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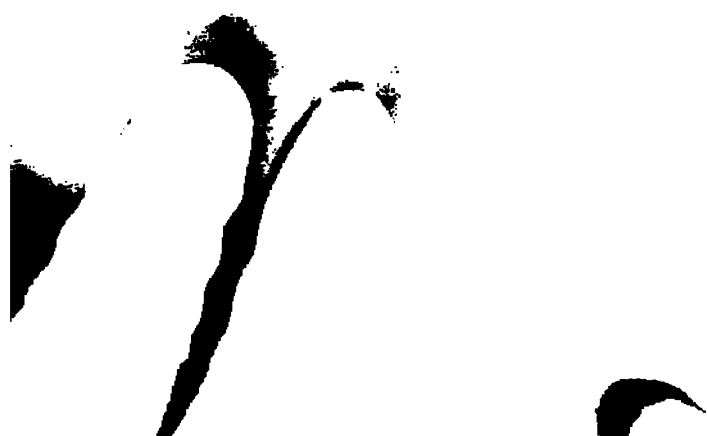




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HIGH CHURCH.

"Foppish airs
And histrionic mummary, that let down
The pulpit to the level of the stage."—COWPER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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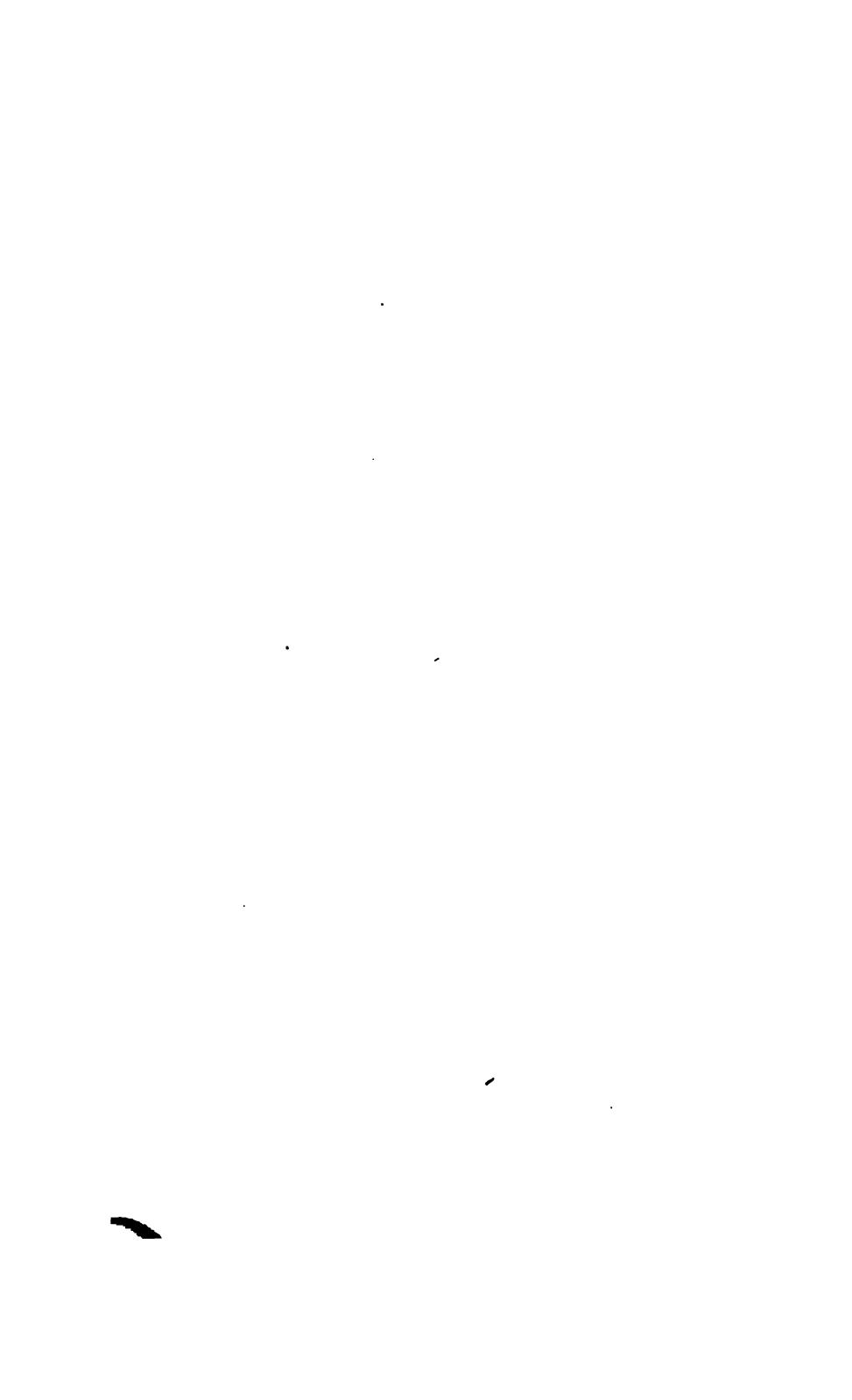


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PART THE THIRD.

VOL. II.

B



HIGH CHURCH.

CHAPTER I.

SEPARATION.

MARTIN CHESTER was wrong in his idea of the world knowing nothing about his separation from his wife. The world is not so blind to the signs upon the surface, and, disguise them as we may, its sharp eyes find out every flaw, and it will prate after its own fashion. The world—

“ ——— the world,
All ear and eye, with such a stupid heart
To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue
To blare its own interpretation,”

knew that Martin Chester and his wife had separated; and the Tenchester folk discussed the reasons for the act, *pro* and *con*, with considerable fervour, till some new wonder arose, and ran its nine days' course. Tenchester world took a favourable view of the case, however; and as the world in general is not inclined to put the best construction on the acts of its worldlings, it may be considered that Mr. and Mrs. Martin Chester were let down with uncommon gentleness. Man and wife seldom part without some very hard reasons being assigned for the same; and the less proof there is of the cause, the more the world sighs and shakes its head. But in this instance the world took a charitable view of the case, and set it down, as Martin had wished, to religious differences. The one absorbing topic was Tractarianism, and here was another proof of the evil it had caused. The seeds of dissension, sown broadcast by

Stone and son, were starting up in every direction — at the family table, at the fireside, round the death-bed ; and proofs were not wanting of the evil that a church divided against itself can spread. Take the last case, said the world of Low Church : here were a young couple, handsome, wealthy and affectionate, who had gone to the altar full of love and faith in each other—and lo, the result ! Tractarianism had risen up between them ; the husband had seen signs of Popery in the services at St. Jude's, and the wife but strenuous efforts to add to the holy and inspiring effects of Protestant worship. The strife of opinion had grown too bitter between them, and left them no other choice but parting.

The world thought Mr. Chester an ill-used and high-minded man—and his wife an earnest, but weak and misguided woman : it was a pity Mr. Chester had not been more firm, and insisted on his wife ab-

juring the pomps and vanities of Tractarianism; but the lesson he was teaching his wife might bear good fruit in time.

Martin Chester let the world have its say, and answered nothing. Even brother Frank dare not speak of his troubles yet, with the cares fresh upon him, and the wounds still unhealed. Once Mr. Grimley, in much dismay and in deep sorrow, begged to know if he had been the unfortunate cause of the disunion, and ventured to assert his strong belief in the purest motives of Mrs. Chester; and had been sternly checked by——

“I believe that Mrs. Chester’s motives are the purest and best, but they do not agree with mine. We cannot experience happiness together—therefore, the least evil is separation.”

“But——”

“But no more, Mr. Grimley,” said Martin, closing the lid of his desk with a slam,

and frowning over it at his partner; "I have made up my mind, and did you ever know *me* change it? Did you ever know me care to be insulted by expostulation?"

He snatched at his pen and commenced writing rapidly. Mr. Grimley looked for a moment at the stern face, and then turned away with a sigh. He could do no good by interfering with a man whose resolves were unswervable. He had tried it with Mr. Stone and his son, and had got embroiled in half-a-dozen law-suits; and been muddled up with bishop, clergymen, lawyers and judges—gaining an inch of ground one day and losing an ell the next—till High Church had saddled his mind all the days of his life, and sat upon him like an incubus. Besides, he was of a firm disposition himself; and he could no more expect the son of an old friend to give way, than to give way himself, and let the Papistical

doings at St. Jude's flourish on without his efforts to check them.

So Martin Chester kept to his one simply-furnished room at the house of business, lived and fared like a hermit, and, with the exception of looking a trifle paler, and not a trifle more grave and stern, seemed not to be suffering from the change. That the clerks in the counting-house, or the men in the warehouse, did not feel the effects of the change, however, is not quite so apparent. He never appeared before them with a smile on his face now, and there was a sharp expression in his eyes which they did not care to meet too often. His presence in the office or store-rooms was the signal for intense application to business; and not a word was spoken, or glance misdirected, till his quick decisive tread was echoing outside in the passages. He had no mercy on defaulters either, and the rod of iron fell heavily on him who blundered at his books, or made mistakes in delivery. Instant

dismissal—in many cases to old servants of the firm—followed such business omissions, and he turned a deaf ear to all appeals for grace and another trial.

“I do my duty, and I expect those who serve me to do the same,” was the cold reply; and it was the fiat of Rhadamanthus.

Every Sunday, Martin Chester turned his back on his native town, and walked many miles across country to a little church in the fields; and it was not till late in the night that he returned, and let himself into his dark, desolate warehouses. Frank made one effort to induce his brother to live with him, and share his bachelor quarters, but Martin would have none of the offer.

The place suited him; he preferred some one being always at hand, and at present—he did not say how long it would last—he had an objection to company.

“Ay—and to your best friends, Martin,” said Frank, stoutly.

"My best friend is myself—he alone knows what is best for me."

"You are favouring him too much. I believe he is your enemy, Martin; he is turning you even against me."

"No," said Martin, quickly.

"Why, you are not like the friend and the brother—you are not the Martin Chester of old times."

"Time changes all of us, for better or worse. There is no standing still with the world rolling under our feet. Not the old Martin Chester?—right. I cannot expect it; but the old brother, with the old heart, under all this asceticism. Give me but time, and you shall not complain of me, Frank."

"Well, a short time, I hope."

"A deep wound takes a long while to heal. Let me have my own way, and don't hurry me!"

Time went on, and Martin, showing little change, was left to his own way. Frank re-

spected his wish, and interfered no more : he could do little good, for he had no comfort to offer. Of his own free will, and actuated by the promptings of his own generous heart, he had sought Ada, in the hope of finding in her some signs of a wish for her husband's return ; and he had been met with the questions—" Was it Mr. Chester's desire that he should call ?"—" Had Mr. Chester ever mentioned her name ? "

These questions answered candidly, drew the veil over the best feelings of Ada, and showed to Frank a strong-minded woman, on whom no impression could be made. There was no returning to the past—leave her to track her own future, and not pain her by thrusting before her all the bitter thoughts she was striving so hard to keep down ! Only once she showed signs of the past Ada, and that was when Frank was going away, shaking his head at the hopelessness of his task, and the utter wreck of a happiness he had

once envied his brother. She seized his hand in both hers, and pressed it warmly for a moment.

“You—*his* brother—are very kind and good, to come here and seek to make this home again. God bless you for your profitless errand! I shall not readily forget it.”

“Poor wife!—poor Martin!” muttered Frank to himself, as he marched down the front garden. “I should like to have a clear field, a couple of hours quiet, and that confounded Geoffrey Stone’s head within arm’s length! It’s sure to be his doing, with his High Church humbug.”

Turning to Geoffrey Stone, let us see what he thought of all this; for he knew more of the secret springs that had worked this ruin of a home than any one, save the two unfortunates most interested. He was a man of feeling—a little moved his heart, though a second-class earthquake would not have moved

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him if he had had his own peculiar reasons for remaining quiescent. The turbulent crowd in his father's church, the irreverence and the blasphemy that rose up every Sunday within it, wrung every fibre of his sensitive nature, but he would not check it by returning to the more simple practice of his predecessors. In his opinion, that was a dereliction from his duty to God, and he feared not the consequences of doing his duty.

When the news first reached his ears that Mr. and Mrs. Chester had separated, he was for a moment stunned. The scene on the country road, Martin's wild manner and taunting words, suggested to him the true reason; he could not put it entirely down to religious differences with the easy, blundering world. He said nothing to Mrs. Chester concerning a resolution that he formed on the instant; a painful resolution, naturally—for the resolves of Geoffrey Stone were always more or less painful. He had never spoken

of the separation to Mrs. Chester, and he seemed to take the absence of Martin from church as a sign of objection to his views, nothing more.

But this strong, earnest bigot wasted many hours of his valuable time in seeking Martin : twice or thrice a-day he braved the objectionable presence of Mr. Grimley, and made his appearance at the warehouse to ask for Mr. Martin Chester ; and Mr. Martin Chester's message was always—he was too busy, or too unwell, to see Mr. Geoffrey Stone. At last the curate's persistence brought the less courteous message that he, Mr. Martin Chester, declined to see Mr. Stone on any business whatever, and would take Mr. Stone's less frequent visits as the greatest favour that gentleman could possibly bestow. The curate reddened at this verbal answer to his request, delivered by a grinning, blue-faced monkey of a clerk, with a pen between his teeth, and went his way homewards almost inclined to

give up the effort to promote Martin's happiness, or clear up Martin's doubts.

But he did not give up ; he changed his tactics, and waited till the offices were cleared, and he could watch the great premises without alarming Martin by his propinquity. For three nights he waited thus, and on the fourth—a damp, drizzling night, not at all suitable for a gentleman to whom a voice was everything—his watch was rewarded with success, and Martin appeared. Martin Chester was closing and locking the door behind him, when the “Good evening, sir,” of the curate startled him.

Martin Chester locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and then turned to the curate.

“I have been seeking you, Mr. Chester, for many days and nights.”

“I am sorry for it.”

“I have been anxious to offer every explanation, to clear up any doubts you may

have in your mind against me—against your wife. Will you allow me to relate a simple story?—I ask it earnestly, humbly.”

“I wish to hear no story, sir. I have abjured fiction, and taken to plain fact.”

“But your happiness——”

“Was one of the wildest fictions man ever studied or thought true. Good evening!”

“But for your soul’s sake.”

“Think of your own, sir, before you weary me with preaching about mine. I dispute your right to stop me. Your faith is not mine, and I believe not in you or your creed. Let me be quit of you; your presence is the forerunner of evil.”

“Go on your way, rash and obstinate. Your sins be on your head.”

“I require them on none other.”

And Martin strode away defiantly; and the curate went back to the parsonage, giving up for the present all hope of bringing the husband to the feet of the wife.

CHAPTER II.

RICHARD BURLES' SUPPER PARTY.

As the summer days began to shorten, and Martin Chester to become more accustomed to his bachelor-life, his room at the warehouse was less occupied. It had been Martin's custom, after the completion of business, to shut himself in his room, and to remain there still and silent till morning; but whether he found solitude something too formidable to seek and make a favourite of, or whether he were recovering from the first effects of the blow that had fallen on him, certain it is, that after business hours

he did not fly to his chamber with all the past eagerness to be alone. He had hinted to Frank that time and a strong will would cure him; and Frank saw, with no small degree of pleasure, Martin's asceticism diminish. 'Martin,' thought Frank, 'seeks relief every evening in long country walks—presently he will need a companion, and then what a deal of good I shall do him!'

But Martin Chester made no sign of requiring a companion; and Frank waited vainly, but hopefully, for his brother's solicitation, even began to study a second-hand "Joe Miller" that he had picked up cheap at a book-stall, with the intention of giving a light and cheerful turn to his conversation when his services were ultimately required.

One evening Martin took a longer walk than usual; and it had been nightfall an hour, when he was returning at a smart pace towards Tenchester. Was it a sudden

whim or a fixed resolution that turned him half a mile out of his way, and caused him to make a detour from the London Road, and cross a few flat stony fields into the road parallel with it?—the road where stood his own villa that he had set his face against. It was nightfall, and there was nobody to see him. Was he a coward to be ashamed of passing his own house?

He did not pass it; in the shadow of some trees over-arching the roadway he took his stand, and looked towards that house wherein he had left his wife desolate. There was a light in the room where they had shaken hands, and said good-bye; and once the figure of a woman—whose figure he knew too well!—crossed slowly between the blind and the light.

Martin wondered if she were thinking of him then—if any better, warmer feeling lurked in her heart now many weeks had passed, and time had begun to make inroads

on the year—or whether use had become second nature, and she was happier alone? He fancied she was not happy—that there was something strange about that figure on the blind—it crossed so slowly—the head was so much bent! It was a despairing attitude, and his heart thrilled watching it. Psha!—let him get home, and shut these dreams out—he was growing mad or childish. All was over; she had said “*It shall not be,*” and they had parted for ever. The strong will of Martin Chester exerted itself. It was the will of the steam-engine, unwieldy, hard to manage, yet powerful. Once set in motion by the new impulse within, and its work became easier, and the long train of sorrows, and the heavy load of mental doubts, were borne swiftly along the railroad of life. He wrenched himself away from all that had been worth calling home—from the home, poor dreamer, he had looked forward to when he was courting Ada Hartley—and he set

forth at a quick pace, and without once looking back, to the offices in High Street.

There was the church of St. Jude's to pass next; he had not been near it since his wife's confession to the curate; he hated that church. From the window of his room at the warehouse, the old stone tower over the house-roof had been an eye-sore and an abomination to him. Many a day he might have crushed his worst thoughts beneath the pressure of business, if that gaunt pile of stone-work had not told its story to him across the streets; and now he was suddenly upon it, and the stars were glittering over it, and a late red moon was coming up behind the parsonage.

There was a light in the room at the parsonage, and a figure on the blind there also—that of a man at his desk, writing or reading intently. He recognized that figure too, but he cared to increase his pace rather than watch it. He

had had enough of Geoffrey Stone's shadow on his life, without caring to admire it on a window-blind.

"Ha!—who's there?"

Martin had nearly stumbled over some person standing very still and erect against the gate-post of the parsonage, and he turned to more closely examine the individual. There was little difficulty in recognizing him, for he stepped into the middle of the footpath rubbing his left shin.

"That wor a moighty hard kick, Master Ches'r."

"Sam Burles?"

"Ay, sir, all that's left o' him after three months' board and lodgin' in Tenchester quod."

"How long have you been at liberty?"

"Two hours or thereabouts. Look here now."

Sam took off his rabbit-skin cap, and showed a head closely cropped—shorn of

all those luxuriant horse-hair ringlets in which his soul had once delighted.

“That’s a pretty clean shave, Mast’r—that’s what I call turning a thing off neat and clean and scrubby. Well, I haven’t settled the bill.”

“What are you lurking here for, Sam?” asked Martin.

“I thought I just coom this way, and pay my respects to the curate, and thank him for all past favours—but he’s busy, you see.”

“I see.”

“Maybe he’ll ha’ his work to do and find himself busier yet. Darn him! I wish I had him at Pentcote stream such a night as this, with this hand of mine at his cursed throat!”

“No good’ll come of bearing malice, Sam,” said Martin; “from what I have heard, you fairly earned your three months’ lodging.”

“ P’raps I did—p’raps I didn’t,” said Sam, as Martin and he proceeded up the High Street; “ but he desarved his three months, too, for he was nearly the death of me with his blasted knuckles—I couldn’t swaller for a week ! But he’s a gen’leman, and I’m a poor devil with a bad character. I’ll be worse before I die, though.”

“ Why do you not emigrate, Sam ? They want some strong hands and hard workers at the diggings.”

“ I hate digging.”

“ You shouldn’t leave all the work to the old man—he has got enough to do to keep himself, Sam.”

“ Oh, I help him in my way. I pick up a little game out of the presarves, and find him in grub ; he forks out the pocket pieces. He be not a bad father, moind you. Darned if I think I haven’t been too harsty with him at toimes, when he ha’ put my back up, preaching loike. Preaching’ll

do me no good, and it's only spoilt his temper; he be so naterally rough, he can't abide it more nor I can. He's got a silly idea that God's going to pardon all his old games just because he's sorry and makes harf-a-dozen more baskets a-week—but he's not a bad 'un for all that. Why, he wrote me word he'd get a spread for me the night they let me go, and I'm going to ha' somethin' fit to eat for a change."

"Well, you do not seem in a hurry, Sam, to seek your father."

"Ten's the time, and it warnts five minutes. Thankee for your observation all the same, sir. My father's a good sort, and him and you be the only couple I'd cross the road to lend a helping hand, if warnted. And when you warnt a hand, Mast'r Chester, there's Sam Burles's—black enough, but ready."

"Thank you, Sam. When I am in need of a friend I'll think of you."

“ It’ll foight for a friend—it’ll hold on like grim death to an enemy. There it be, sir.”

Sam made a great parade of that dirty hand of his, and presented it with such an amount of persistence to Martin, that there was some difficulty in the young merchant divesting himself of the idea that Iron Sam wanted to make him a present of it, and expected him to put it in his pocket and walk off with it there and then.

“ You’ve had troubles of your’n, and I ha’ had troubles of moine, and there’s my hand, sir.”

“ Yes, yes—I see,” said Martin, somewhat impatiently; “ thank you, good night.”

“ And if it’s a hand that’s wanted, there it be, sir; and it can hold like a vice, or the claw of that cussed curate’s. Say the word, and it’s your’n.”

Martin muttered something in response, nodded his head, and increased his pace;

but Iron Sam's legs, which had won for their owner walking matches, running matches and leaping matches, kept up with him.

"I heerd to-night that you and your wife wern't the best of friends, sir!" said Sam.

"Where did you hear that?" cried Martin, turning round fiercely.

"It's no secret, o' course; I heerd it at the 'Sun,' on the Loondon road. I called there cooming from my lodgings."

"Ah! you have been drinking."

"What's a man loike me to do but drink? I ha' been to prison, now, and it's all up with me!"

"I must bid you good night, Sam."

They were at the door of the premises of Chester, Grimley, and Chester, and the head of the firm drew out his latch-key.

Sam, who had watched the operation, said, with a short, irritating laugh—

"Who talks aboot you living awa' from the good lady, now? You foired up when I axed the question; but you must ha' had that question axed a tidy lot of times, sir, if you live here."

"Those who know me don't care to harass me too much, Sam."

"Ah! you've seen trouble, sir, loike me. It's the parson's church-doing that you don't loike, and the missis does—and you've split about it. You're one of us, now, and we'll pay those Stones out yet."

Martin had opened the door by this time, and, without interchanging any more compliments with Iron Sam, he entered the passage, and slammed the door again so close to the face of the neatly-cropped gentleman outside, that Sam leaped backwards with an oath.

"That's toidy civil treatment of a friend he harn't seen for three months odd," said Sam, apostrophizing the door with half-shut

eyes, and swinging himself from his toes to his heels, and *vice versa* ; “ that’s how the trodden on get trodden on more in these toimes. Let a fellow get out of quod, and where’s his pals gone—why, they’re dropped like stones. Stones ! — reverend Stones, dam ’em ! ”

And with his hands in his pockets, Sam Burles, in the slightest degree unsteady, went up the High Street and crossed the Market-place, and turned into Pleasant Street, seeking that harbour of refuge for the destitute, the “ Peaceful Rest,” where man and beast—and especially beast, as before said—could obtain refreshment, board and lodging.

The “ Peaceful Rest ” tap-room presented an imposing scene that evening as Iron Sam lounged into it, and received the cheers and hearty greetings of his friends, and the salutations of his father, who clapped him on the shoulder, and called him “ his poor, unfortu-

nate boy!" The floor of the tap-room had been re-sanded for the occasion, and all the spittoons re-sawdusted—a superfluous formality, those articles not being generally patronized. A narrow table extended the whole length of the room, and on each side were ranged four or five nondescript personages, who might be taken for navvies, or colliers, or factory men, or thieves, and the like number of bold-faced, degraded-looking women. Shock-headed, coatless, shoeless, shirtless vagabonds of men, and tattered slipshod, immodest drabs of women, such as infest manufacturing towns, and appear to have been turned out of the factory gates with other refuse material. Men and women to be shunned in open day and in the broad streets, and to be especially wary of at night in dismal country lanes; men and women whom poverty and dram-drinking had led to crime, and turned from honest company—who had met with their desserts in life, perhaps,

and could only herd together like wolves in the dark places to which society had thrust them.

Alas for city missionaries, and all the efforts of a handful of good men, who fight as hard a battle, in the face of as great a danger, as ever won the Victoria Cross! These are the people who keep society properly balanced, and whose hearts there is no touching. Children of the ever-busy devil, doing the devil's work, and festering at the core of all cities, in all nations, as if some strange law kept them there incurable—a hideous curse and warning!

“Here’s Sam Burles agin!” shouted the men; and “Here’s our handsome dare-devil Sam!” cried the women, one of whom—a shade less dirty, and a degree more neat in her attire—a woman, with a pale and haggard face that had been handsome once, flung herself upon his chest and kissed him.

“Ah! she’s coming the soft-soap dodge now, Sam!” cried another woman, who had

been rapping on the table with a black-handled fork from the moment of Iron Sam's appearance; "but she's been going it, she has, since you've been lagged."

"It's a lie!" cried the woman in Sam's arms.

"Bravo, Jenny!" said Sam, patting her rather roughly on the back. "Stand up for yerself and shame the old 'un. You and I know each other by this toime, and when I coom into my fortin, gal, you shall be Mrs. Burles, and wear a sky-blue-pink dress!"

A roar of laughter from the men, a screeching series of hilarious yells from the women, followed this little pleasantry on the part of Sam, who, elated by the ovation he had received, brightened up, and forgot the ingratitude of man.

"Well, the jemmies 'll be done to rags," said Burles senior—"that's all I can say, if you waste any more o' the blessed toime."

Thus called to order, the men and women

set themselves to the business of the night, and the jemmies—or baked sheep's heads of a peculiar malformation, and swimming in a suspicious gravy that smelt of size, and melted dripping, and a washing-day—were placed upon the table, at the head of which sat Richard Burles, the giver of the feast.

“It's on'y once in a way the prodigal cooms home,” said Richard Burles, “and we gives him, in consequence, the fatted sheep's heads—a calf not being obtainable in Pleasant Street. You fellers, and you gals, never heered the story, p'raps?”

“I have,” said Jenny, and “Deuce a bit of it,” cried the others.

“It'll do arter supper, twixt the other talk not quite so edifying,” said Burles senior, proceeding to dole out the pieces. “Here, Jack, there's a prime half for you—jaw and all. Now, who says—*eyes*?”

Two or three said “eyes” amongst the ladies, but the masculine portion of the com-

munity appeared to have more delicate stomachs, and declined them. The dishes were fairly cleared, however, at the first set off, and the only interruption to the harmony was a trifling dispute at the further end of the table about sharing the gravy fair.

"I wish I ha' more to give you, and stand treat for," said Burles, when the clattering of knives and forks had begun; "but the will's the deed, you know."

"Ay, ay—old Burles means well," said a man, to which his neighbour added, sardonically—

"He's a first-rater. He's going to heaven, he is!"

There was another laugh at this. "Going to heaven" was a good joke at the "Peaceful Rest."

"Heaven it bean't, as I knows on," replied Burles senior, when the laugh had subsided. "I've been a backsliding myself lately."

“What the devil’s that?” cried a curious guest.

“I ha’ been a-falling into the old broad road,” explained Burles, gloomily; “there’s nothing seems to turn out well with what I do. It’s all sixes and sevens—sixties and seventies amost. Upon my soul!”—with a bang on the table with his heavy fist, that made the sheep’s-head bones rattle in their plates—“trying to repent it wor, after that little wiry chap came and preached six year ago at Ponder’s Green, and made my flesh creep. I did try what I could do then; I took to work, and people got more civil loike, and Edmond’s put me in a cottage; and then slap came trouble agin. Puseyism it wor—and collaring a fellow’s freehold, and locking up his son, and pointing me out as a black sheep, and taking my work away in an under-handed manner, it wor. I’m not so full of heaven as I used to be!”

“Bravo, Burles!”

"Bravo it bean't, stupid. There be no-thing to bravo a fellow for. Sam's going to turn out wrong, now, and drag me with him."

"Ah! I was a hopeful chap afore they locked me up," said Sam, with a wink at Jenny, who laughed a little spasmodically.

"And I ha' been without him three months, and out o' work six weeks—it's all bad."

"You needn't ha' been without me three days, old man," said Sam.

"How's that, boy?"

"Because I could ha' got out and took French leave. It wor easy enough; but where wor the good? Besides, they know me at T. G. now as a quiet one, and if ever I get back for a long spell, I can show 'em a clean pair of heels."

"Trust Sam Burles to do that—Iron Sam's health when the gin comes!"

The gin appeared in due course, and the beer and pipes, and everything calculated to add to the harmony of the scene, and the grandeur of the entertainment. The supper things having been cleared away, the talking became louder, and the laughing and the stream of oaths continual. Men and women swore on all topics; they could no more get on in a light conversation without an oath to aid every dozen words, than a donkey could trot fifty consecutive yards without a stick with a pin at the end of it.

Old Burles was the only person in the room who set a good example, by which nobody profited. Sam swore volubly, and Jenny anathematized once or twice a young lady with a black eye, whose attentions to Sam seemed rather marked; and the landlord stood at the door and swore at his customers, who swore back at him, and threatened several times to rip him up. One or two

fresh faces dropped in after supper to shake hands with Sam, and two policemen peered round the door a minute as if in search of some one, and then went away again.

Suddenly Burles senior rose to his feet, and favoured the company that evening with his first and only oath.

“He had treated them all like princes, and this wor gratitude. Sam’s health oughtn’t ha’ been forgotten arter all they’d said — and all they’d stuffed and swilled !”

Viva ! Sam Burles’ health, with all the musical honours, and a hundred apologies for forgetting him—for he’s a jolly good fellow—a jolly good fellow, and so said all of them !

Sam Burles, in a cloud of tobacco-smoke, was presently on his legs—very shaky and untrustworthy legs they were now—and returning thanks in a manner not particularly Demosthenic.

“Mark this, now. I harn’t—hic—much to say; I arn’t a speaker loike the old man, there—but mark this.”

Here was a long pause, and many, finding nothing to mark, and thinking Iron Sam was only taking his time to subside into a sitting position, began to rap the tables, and resume their conversation.

“Mark this—when you’ve done that cussed row—I say it now—hic—I woan’t flinch from it at any time—the young parson scored one, but by —— when my score begins, he’ll get the worst of the game. You’ll see that in a week or two!”

And ~~Sam~~ Burles sat down, and it was some moments before the blandishments of Jenny and the young lady with the black eye dissipated the frowns from his swarthy countenance.

CHAPTER III.

MORE CONFESSION ON A DIFFERENT PRINCIPLE.

MRS. MARTIN CHESTER knew so little of the world, and had been so accustomed to others thinking for her all her life—mother, father, and then husband—that it was many weeks before she had finally settled on her plans for the future. She resolved upon ~~her~~ course at last: she would leave Tenchester, or, at all events—for her heart sunk at that thought—she would quit the house that had been her husband's where love had given forth such shoots of rare promise and been so suddenly scathed. She would take the money that

had been hers before her marriage, for she considered it her right ; that would keep her as a lady—for her wants were few, and there was more than she could spend. As for receiving a farthing from him who had abandoned her—who had suspected her honour, and, full of that suspicion, had left her for the world, she would have died a beggar at his feet first. Poor Ada grew indignant at times thinking of her wrongs, and, mayhap, forgot too often the true cause that had sundered those whom God had joined together. There were generous moods, however, with this impulsive, warm-hearted woman, in which she could forget her injuries, and in the solitude of her chamber accuse herself and her stubbornness for all the sorrow that lay in her path. In those times she had not been the trusting, obedient wife, and was suffering justly for breaking her marriage vow. And whether her thoughts were generous or ungenerous, she was equally miserable.

Her only refuge was religion—true harbour of refuge for many a goodly vessel battered by the world's ill-usage! To escape from the thoughts that burned at her brain and made her head swim, there was but one resource left, and to that she flew, and found to a certain extent comfort.

It would have been better for her at that time had she frequented a Protestant place of worship where the services were less showy, and the excitement of opposition was not; it would have been better for more than her! She began to identify herself with the cause, and to consider the Church persecuted—as certainly St. Jude's was by High and Low Church bigots—two of the hardest and stubbornest stools that ever brought a bewildered Christian to the ground. She thought it her duty to oppose to the rabble of a Sunday evening a fair show of reverent worshippers, and more than once some stinging words

brought the blood to her cheek in consequence.

"Here's the fine lady who gave up her husband for Puseyism—step a little aside, Jack, and let her ladyship sneak round the back-way to her pew," was an observation bestowed upon a friend for her particular edification the last Sunday evening she had attended divine service at St. Jude's, with the faithful of the congregation, the choice pickings from Pleasant Street, and twenty-five of the county police.

Ada Chester was inflexible at times—the reader is aware of it. No revilings could keep her from St. Jude's; the warning of her husband had not been heeded, wherefore should she fear the reproaches and sarcasms of the crowd? And Ada did not lose one of her friends—friends and acquaintances rallied round her to show how badly she had been treated by her husband, and in what respect she was held. Lady Cheyne and daughter

called very frequently to see her—even took her away to Haselton House, where she met the incumbent and his son at times. And Geoffrey Stone she never saw at Haselton House, never met in the green lanes around Tenchester, without colouring a little and thinking of Martin's stern injunctions on that dreadful day. She was always anxious to reach home on those occasions, and shut herself in her room. And yet she was a great favourite with Mr. Geoffrey Stone, who felt, not lightly, for the peculiar position in which her fierce husband had placed her. As a minister caring for his flock, he took a great interest in this bereaved one; he sent her choice volumes on the doctrine of resignation from his ample library, and even preached a sermon one morning on the same subject for her especial benefit—though he considered it applied generally to his congregation, and would not have confessed its personal application. There was a strange charm in Mrs.

Chester's society, that he began to feel, and that began to perplex him ; he liked to be at her side, he loved to hear her voice and to see the soft sad eyes turned towards him. He could hardly account for it ; it was not like any feeling he had for his betrothed—certainly not ; it was a respectful kind of pity, and he was not ashamed of it.

He considered Mrs. Chester had been treated very badly by her husband, and that the punishment was frightfully disproportionate to the offence, even if offence it could be called. Had he been Mrs. Chester's husband, with all his firmness *he* could not have acted in that manner, and wilfully cut asunder all his home ties. Had he been—but his thoughts had taken a childish turn ; let him hurry away from them, let him bury them in his books of theology, over which he bent with a heart beating faster than usual.

The health of the Reverend John Stone

at this period began to fail, and the duties appertaining to so troublesome a church as St. Jude's to become too onerous. He would be glad to see Geoffrey married, and incumbent of St. Jude's in his place; and he dropped several hints to that effect, which were rather coldly received, for a young man betrothed to so pretty and amiable a girl as Miss Cheyne.

Geoffrey Stone had always been averse to precipitate marriages; he preferred to study the character and disposition of Miss Cheyne a little longer—his father would pardon him, but he thought a year hence would be time enough to marry. Besides, Miss Cheyne would prefer waiting; he was positive of that. There was a slight contraction of the brow as he alleged that plea; it was painful to his vanity, but he had observed a decided effort on Miss Cheyne's part to turn from a question that should have been absorbing to both, and

discuss anything except her coming marriage. In his heart he was not quite satisfied with Miss Cheyne; she showed him a great deal of respect—she paid deference to all his opinions—she evidently thought him a good, earnest, clever man, and one with whom she could trust her future happiness; but he felt hardly a lover, even after he had proposed, and had had a long conference with Lady Cheyne, and been finally accepted. Why, Lady Cheyne, when he came to think of it, was warmer in her manner towards him than his Margaret. Perhaps he was too solemn, or too dull a man for Miss Cheyne—she seemed never to forget he was a minister!

They were a strange specimen of a plighted pair, certainly; since their engagement not one word of affection, not one ardent look, not any of the wild, passionate thoughts which have their birth with love, and make the season of love

such a world of its own, had ever passed between them. They were a quiet couple. You and I, dear readers, have met such once or twice in life, and taken them for brother and sister, or a lady and gentleman introduced to each other a few minutes ago. They have the admirable art of repressing their emotions, and knowing how to behave in society; and they are a couple infinitely to be preferred, after all, to a pair of turtle-doves, who sit cooing together in corners, and showing the world how they love each other. From the last class spring more than a fair half of the poker and fire-shovel divisions, I am inclined to think.

And yet one don't like too much frigidity; even the Reverend Geoffrey Stone would have preferred a loving glance now and then, a pressure of the hand, when no one was looking, a blush or two to vary the set expression of content—perhaps, resigna-

discuss anything except her coming marriage. In his heart he was not quite satisfied with Miss Cheyne; she showed him a great deal of respect—she paid deference to all his opinions—she evidently thought him a good, earnest, clever man, and one with whom she could trust her future happiness; but he felt hardly a lover, even after he had proposed, and had had a long conference with Lady Cheyne, and been finally accepted. Why, Lady Cheyne, when he came to think of it, was warmer in her manner towards him than his Margaret. Perhaps he was too solemn, or too dull a man for Miss Cheyne—she seemed never to forget he was a minister!

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complicated machinery to the left must be out of order somewhere, or may lean—heaven help it!—more fondly in another direction, despite the danger-signals by the way.

Still, we do not imply that the heart of Margaret was swerving from its object, was not doing its utmost to turn in the right direction, and beat alone for her future husband—we only say at present, that she was not happy. She was not happy in her engagement, and she looked with something like dread towards her marriage with the cold, stately curate of St. Jude's. He would love and honour her after his fashion; it would be a grand match—for he was an only son, and the Reverend John Stone was a man of money, and did not think of marrying again; and her mother had so wished to see her a minister's wife!

And Lady Cheyne was of the firm order, like Martin Chester, or the Stone family. With all her nervousness, and with all her

love for her daughter, if she fancied she had found the right man for her daughter's husband, that man must be very wary, that daughter must be strangely defiant, to thwart her in her wish. The reader has seen the result of Lady Cheyne's manœuvres—here was her daughter Margaret going to marry Mr. Stone !

That proposed marriage, despite Margaret's coldness and the curate's lack of zeal, was hastened too. The incumbent and Lady Cheyne had many interviews, unknown to the young couple—worked silently the machinery, till all was ready for the attack, and lover or maiden must confess want of love, or get married. It was all admirably arranged ; and this dull, "dead-and-alive" pair succumbed to their parents' desires and finally fixed the day, and went out "shopping" once or twice, and ordered their wedding garments.

The world of Tenchester, that had grown

tired of talking about Mr. and Mrs. Chester, snapped greedily at the new topic of the curate's marriage, and canvassed the advantages and disadvantages of the match at sundry "High Teas." When Margaret Cheyne had been called upon to fix the day, and there was no escaping from it, she became a shade more pale and several degrees more thoughtful. Lady Cheyne affirmed Margaret was giving proper reflection to her important step in life—and perhaps she was, but there came not across her thoughts any of those deep rushes of unutterable joy which harmonize with the soul, and make the trembling steps of the maiden proceed hopefully altar-wards. In those few weeks preceding the day fixed for her marriage Margaret Cheyne called frequently upon Mrs. Chester, and was always glad to take Ada back with her to Haselton House. Ada took a great interest in the match between Miss Cheyne and Mr. Stone—hoped sometimes, with a sigh at her own hard fate,

that it might prove happier than her own. It appeared singular to her at times that there was so little outward show of affection between the lovers; but, remembering her own antecedents, she did not put great faith in outward signs now. Still, Mr. Stone need not have looked quite so solemn, or talked always so gravely to his affianced bride—why, he talked more earnestly to *her* than Margaret; and Margaret, instead of turning cross, or looking jealous, appeared relieved to see him at her side. Then came a sudden sharp thought, that touched her woman's heart; Margaret was anxious for her society, and sought her out more often, in order to keep Mr. Stone ever at a distance! Margaret appeared to have an objection to a *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Stone; and an objection carried to so great an extent, that it began to arouse slowly and surely Ada Chester's suspicions which found voice at last, when Margaret was urging her friend to return in the carriage to Haselton House.

“Why, I never leave you an opportunity to talk with your lover about the future,” said Ada. “I am always the unfortunate third person that makes company unworthy of its name.”

“There will be time enough for Mr. Stone and I to talk of the future when we are married.”

“Ah! you are a cold-blooded *fiancée*. One would think, Margaret, you were desperately in love with somebody else.”

“There are no eligible somebodys in Tenchester.”

“And no one from the past whose memory is too dear, and whose hopes were once like your own?”

The scarlet flush swept across the face for a moment. Geoffrey Stone, looking at her then, would have not considered her one of the dummy species. Margaret answered, however, lightly enough—

“We all have our boy sweethearts, who

make life for a little while a romance. Their passion and ours die out, and the meteor flashes away, and leaves us again to the real. These sentimentalities do us a certain amount of good, and prepare us for a time when we shall be more true and less romantic. You must not think I do not esteem Mr. Stone very highly."

Ada said no more that day, but her belief in Margaret's future happiness was not so strong. Then there came to Ada, like an inspiration, the remembrance of Frank Chester, and the story of his disappointment related one morning by her truant husband. She had thought of the story several times, and pitied Frank, and even wondered at Miss Cheyne's obduracy in refusing him; thought of everything, save that Margaret might have loved him once upon a time—nay, might have loved him all her life!

She ventured to sound Lady Cheyne upon this point—very delicately, and in a manner

that roused no suspicions ; and Lady Cheyne re-assured her for a day or two, so confident was her ladyship that Mr. Geoffrey Stone was the first and only love of her daughter. Ada's doubts began to revive again, when the accidental mention of her brother-in-law's name seemed to disturb slightly Miss Cheyne's composure ; and Ada began to study the best means of arriving at the truth, and even stopping the marriage, if it were necessary, before the poor girl's happiness was utterly wrecked, and she was left a miserable woman, like herself. Here was something more to live for, and give a fresh turn to her thoughts. Here was a new object before her—here were two more lives to be marred, without some one with a bold heart stepping in at all risks to the rescue.

Ada, brave little woman, set herself that task. At all risks—at the hazard of pleasing nobody in the world, and disappointing a great many—she would sound to the depths

of Margaret Cheyne's heart, and do her best to stop the marriage, if another's image were enshrined there. Looking into the pale face of Margaret, and noting that, day after day, it grew more care-worn, and showed greater signs of suffering, Ada could but believe there was something more than maidenly trepidation that set those marks of sorrow on the face.

One Sunday morning, too, the lover himself seemed to side with her. In the midst of the confusion that began on the Sunday in a mild form (and terminated Sunday evening in the very reverse of mild), the Reverend Geoffrey Stone preached a sermon on truthfulness. He was never more earnest and eloquent; and though the few "roughs" who were there muttered and slammed the pew-doors at times, and did their best to throw discredit on the sermon, Geoffrey Stone, in the excitement of his discourse, forgot all about them, and impressed the minds of his listeners. He said

the truth, however painful, however humiliating, ought not to be disguised. It might, in rare cases, involve much sorrow—much temporary sorrow—but the world beyond the present would make amends for such affliction, and reward the sufferer for self-sacrifice in God's cause. He warmed with the subject, and drew a startling picture of the untruthful man; of the man keeping back some truth that, in his simple idea of good and evil, might benefit him, or spare others for a time; of his living on with a lie at his heart, and that lie eating into his soul, and perilling it. He spoke also of the Christian's duty to bear the revelation of such truth with confidence in his Maker, and of the moral cowardice that succumbed to it, and weakened the spirit.

Ada Chester felt a man like Geoffrey Stone could bear the shock of such a revelation, and be none the worse for it.

Geoffrey Stone's sermon made even a deeper impression on Margaret Cheyne.

She returned to Haselton House with the words of her affianced ringing in her ears. Was she living on with a lie at her heart then, and would her marriage with him not end in love after all—only generate his belief in her life-long deceit? She could think of it no more: she was engaged to be married in a week or two, and she should love Geoffrey Stone very much when she was married; if she felt not very tenderly towards him just at present, why she was very young, and the curate was so grave and stern a man. Besides, she had accepted him, and he must love her very dearly to seek her for his wife; she would not blight *his* life now as she had—as she had—ah! let her drop the curtain over that name, before the heart broke to think of it!

But she could not stay in-doors that afternoon; she was too excited to read. Being Sunday, she could take no refuge in

work; and her mother, having fallen asleep with her head over the back of the chair, there was not even the safety-valve of conversation open. She would put on her bonnet and visit Mrs. Chester for half an hour—bring her back to tea if possible. Ada was ever alone, and brooding in her loneliness over the wreck *her* life had been—she would go to her at once.

She went and found Ada Chester sitting at the window opening on the garden, with her little reference-Bible in her lap. Ada had been reading, but the thoughts had wandered away from the book, and the eyes seemed intently studying the carpeted floor.

“Margaret,” she cried, looking up as the door opened, “this is very strange—I have been thinking of you.”

“You did not expect me?” asked Miss Cheyne, a little surprised.

"Not this afternoon—Sunday is not one of your visiting days, Miss Margaret."

"No; but I grew tired of home, and mamma was asleep, and I felt I must come and keep you company a little while," she said. "Oh, Ada! how can you bear to live in this large house alone."

"With the knowledge of what I have suffered in it, do you mean?" asked the wife, sadly.

"No, no—I did not mean that, though every room with its past associations must be painful—you will pardon me for entrenching on such dangerous ground, dear Mrs. Chester?"

"I will thank you."

Margaret Cheyne looked doubtfully at Ada; but when she was seated by her friend's side, the explanation came.

"I believe, Margaret," said Ada, "our friends often err on the right side, for fear of touching our feelings too deeply. There

are subjects of sad, but ever-undying interest, to which our hearts yearn to allude, and which our friends scrupulously shun. Does it always speak well for our kindness when we turn away from the dead friends, and the dead hopes of those who still mourn them?"

"I fear we are often too scrupulous. And yet there are mourners who shrink from plucking aside the veil, and letting the daylight pour in."

"Yes; but even to them there are times—not few and far between—when that daylight would bring ease to their pain, and satisfy that craving which they inwardly have to speak of the lost. Do not let us bury and seal up all that has passed from us, and shun the sympathy of those whom our affliction may touch."

Margaret was troubled.

"You have shown your sympathy with *my* loss by coming to my side and seek-

ing to save me from myself," continued Mrs. Chester ; " you have proved it by your presence here, your new gentleness, and your sisterly affection—by everything but words you have sought to prove that friendship has cemented to a something akin to love since my husband and I began the world apart."

" Dear Ada ! "

" You and I have been only children, Margaret—have never known what the dear face of a sister is. I believe the desire for such a knowledge has brought you and me together ; it is woman's nature to love and confide."

" And could Martin's bigotry extend so far as to part with *you* ? " cried Margaret, flinging her arms round her she had indeed learned to love as a sister.

" The world thinks so—you must not believe it any longer, Margaret," said Ada, returning her embrace : " let me tell you

the story of my own trials, my own weakness—where I was right, and where my cruel opposition brought forth much wrong. I have been wandering in the dark, and my soul is weary for some dear true friend.”

Ada's impulsive nature had broken bounds at last. Ever since Ada had suspected that no common cares were troubling Miss Cheyne, she had been drawn powerfully towards her. It was her life to receive affection—take it away, and what was falsely called life became valueless. Her heart leaped at the kindness and love evinced by Margaret, and Margaret felt it was the true earnest love of a woman she had gained for herself. They had become friends, then sisters, now confidants. Ada for many weeks had longed to tell the whole story of her marriage wreck to Margaret, and felt strangely anxious for the opinion of one dear friend on the course she had pursued. More than that, Ada felt there would follow the

confessions of Miss Cheyne ; and that those two afflicted young women might take counsel together, and gather strength from each other.

With many tears Ada related the story of herself and Martin—of the first wish and the first opposition ; of Martin's increasing reserve, and the growth of his strange demeanour ; of the confession at St. Jude's, which she felt now had been a false step, though her confidence in Mr. Stone had not been misplaced ; of Martin's jealousy, and the last bitter quarrel, where the deep dark waters uprose, and bore away husband and love, and left her engulfed in her desolateness.

Margaret's sobs attested the power of the story over her feelings ; and Margaret's shrewd perception saw at once whence the evil had arisen, and where with courage it might have been checked, had the mind been stronger and the confidence more

great. She thought even now the evil might be remedied, if he or she who undertook the cure were not precipitate; and though some flashes of the past stubbornness in Ada assured her that her offer of mediatrix would not be received, she made an inward resolve to hazard slowly and carefully one attempt to bring Martin Chester to the side of his wife. And while thus moved at the narrative of the trials that had arisen between two who had proceeded to the altar full of love and faith, and while she thought if this were the case in the green tree, what would be done in the dry—that dry, leafless tree of her planting that struck no root, put forth no buds, and but withered more with every day!—she unbarred the gates locked on a secret breathed but to herself in the silence of her chamber, and gave back confidence for confidence.

It was the old story of an early love began before she was a woman—when she had returned home from boarding-school, full of romance, and anxious for affection. Her father was living then—so was the senior Chester, father of Martin and Frank, and an old schoolfellow of Sir William Cheyne's. She and Frank met very frequently—were both young, amiable, and affectionate; and a love sprung up, after the fashion of the old story, too—shown too much by the youth, and shyly kept back by the maiden. It was a love that once or twice nearly found vent in confession, and that a chance word or trivial incident but checked. More than once Margaret felt that words of love were on the lips of Frank Chester; and though her heart beat responsive to his, her timidity, her desire to put off the day of avowal, even her capriciousness, sent the word back to the depths, and left Frank full of love and perplexity. Then her father had died, and Lady Cheyne and she

had gone abroad, where they had first met the Stones, and first talked of St. Jude's to the present incumbent, who was looking out for a country living in England, where his own peculiar religious ideas might set people by the ears. Then they had returned again, and Frank had renewed his visits to Haselton House; and Margaret was a woman then—with all a woman's reserve. Still they had loved, and Frank had hoped, and—she had hoped likewise, till Lady Cheyne had begun to express her doubts of the fitness of such a match, to startle her by many tales of Frank's frivolity, and to alarm her by hints that he was seeking some one else. The old, old story, when the mother takes the opposite side, is a firm woman, and wants her daughter to marry one of her choice. Nothing exactly false, nothing particularly determined, nothing very evident in her manœuvres, and yet incidents occurring that placed the lover in an unfavourable light; and misconceptions which

engendered little quarrels, and jealousy springing up, and angry assertions quickly made and quickly repented of, but which surely began to weaken the gossamer chain between two lovers who had never whispered their affection, and were ignorant how deep in the heart went the golden-tipped arrow. It had been the old story throughout, and it ended in the old fashion. The bolder rival stepped in, the mother took higher ground, and the lover sank to a lower. Mr. Geoffrey Stone had made Lady Cheyne aware of the state of his feelings a day before Frank Chester; and though the clergyman had not been accepted by Miss Cheyne, and had only permission to pay his addresses to her from the mother, still Lady Cheyne had apprised Margaret of the intended honour, and expressed *her* wishes on the subject, and extorted something like a half consent. This old-fashioned story ended with Margaret Cheyne's formal engagement to the Reverend Geoffrey Stone, and with a slow

awakening to the bitter truth. Every step that took her nearer to the altar with the minister, assured her of the mockery of affection that she had for him; she had given way and prayed to her mother, and her mother had reassured her for a day, and said it was only nervousness and romantic nonsense, which a little while would remove. So she had gone on till that Sunday, when Geoffrey Stone's own words in the pulpit had laid bare her conscience, and almost pointed out the rightful path. Restless and excited, she had flown to Ada's side at last, guiltless of all definite object, and yet with a vague sense that she should find relief and hear consoling words. She had intended no confession, but mutual grief had engendered mutual confidence, and there she was weeping on her new sister's breast!

And they were sisters from that time forth; taking counsel and gaining strength from one another—sharing in the griefs that had fallen

on them so early, and aged them so soon. It was the beginning of a love more deep and intense than had hitherto existed between them, and it knew no diminution from that day.

“And are you still content to marry, Margaret? Are you still aware of the wrong, and will you make no effort?”

“What can I say—what can I do?”

“Will you leave it in my hands?” said Ada; “I have not shown too much prudence in my life to recommend myself as intercessor; but I think, remembering Mr. Stone’s sermon of this morning, I can save you and him from much unhappiness.”

“You will see Mr. Stone?”

“At a fitting opportunity, and with your consent.”

“Yes, save me!—save me!”

She buried her face in Ada’s bosom, and Ada wept long and passionately with her, and felt she could suffer a great deal to work

out the happiness of Margaret Cheyne. She felt more humble and more earnest, and that the task before her, though it might test her energy, would save her for a time from the too bitter consciousness of her own trouble. She did not know that the girl for whose happiness she had resolved to strive was also silently resolving to bind once more the ties so rudely severed in that fatal house.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DOOM OF ST. JUDE'S.

THAT Sunday evening there was more uproar at St. Jude's, and greater dissatisfaction at the service than Tenchester had even yet been an unhappy witness to. The Low Church party looked more grave, and the No Church were more uproarious and blasphemous than ever. During the last few Sundays, since the police had been scattered about the church, the excitement appeared to have diminished; and it was not till their withdrawal, in a moment of rash be-

lief in the dawn of better times, that the storm broke forth again, and the howling of the people drowned the^s voice of the minister. It was a storm that affected Geoffrey Stone in its way; he felt the battle of St. Jude's would be one to the death, and that he should never live down, preach down, the determined opposition that surged there before him. He saw, too, that all his labours had been vain, and that all his future efforts for the welfare of his flock—it would be his flock when he had married Miss Cheyne — would be marred by this determined persecution.

The people were against him, half the congregation seemed wavering in its allegiance, the bishop reprimanded him and his father, and obstacles rose in his path at every step. It was all very hard; he was dull and low-spirited; he felt his strength slowly giving way—not his strength of mind or his power of resistance, but the

strength of body to support him in the good fight of Tractarianism! He preached that evening with less force than usual; he saw there was a determined attempt from the mob to render every word of his inaudible, and he knew all his energy would but weaken him, and make no impression on the marble-hearted mass below. There were but few ladies amongst his congregation that evening, and he feared they were likely to be insulted at the termination of the service—there were such strange, fierce-looking faces amidst the crowd. The noise in the church distracted him from his duties, and more than once he looked towards the pew of the Cheyne's, where Lady Cheyne, Margaret, and Ada were, and wished two of them at least had not so courageously braved appearances that night.

The uproar became so great at last, that Geoffrey Stone, for the first time in

his life, stopped in his sermon, and sternly regarded the rioters.

“You have not come to hear the word of God,” he said; “and to preach it in the midst of you, parodied as it is by the blasphemous words that echo from your lips and profane this sacred edifice, cannot be right,—I will preach no more.”

He descended hastily his pulpit, amidst the yelling and execrations of the mob, and an instant afterwards was in his private dress at the door of Miss Cheyne’s pew. There was an evident desire to make a rush towards him from the crowd, and finish the High Church question by dismembering its advocate; but before the courage to brave that man of six feet two had led them to the attack, the police were in the church, and Geoffrey Stone was conducting Lady Cheyne, Ada, and his betrothed, into the vestry.

There was no small trouble that night in clearing the church; the police had not rallied

so strong as usual, and the rioters were less inclined to give way. Several scuffles took place—one or two blows were exchanged—a ringleader, who proved to be Sneaking Jemmy, was captured, and then rescued—the clash of the glass every minute told of windows and gas-lamps being shattered. Geoffrey Stone saw Lady Cheyne and her fair companions to the carriage, which had been drawn into a convenient dark lane, at the back of the parsonage garden. Proceeding down that garden, Geoffrey, in his present excited condition, found some little difficulty in restraining the expression of his opinion concerning the captiousness of Lady Cheyne, who went moving on first, with two hands to her head.

“ Oh, dear, oh, dear!” she said querulously; “ to think my nerves have not been well enough to attend evening service for six weeks, and then, hearing so good a report of the people’s behaviour, to venture out to-

night, and be frightened out of my seven senses. It had been seventeen senses if I had had them, which, thank God, isn't the case—for there had been more to bear then, and my brain's on the burst now. Oh! do make haste, Margaret, and Mrs. Chester, if you please! I'm not in a particular hurry myself, but my dear child——"—and Lady Cheyne fairly broke into a run.

The curate saw the ladies safely to the carriage, expressed a hope that they would experience no ill effects from the sad alarm of that evening, and then walked slowly back, along the garden path, to his house. Once he stopped suddenly, and looked round. There was a clump of laurels springing from a bed on the lawn, and for a moment he directed his glances suspiciously towards it; but all was still, and the peculiar rustling that had startled him came not in that direction.

"I have caught Lady Cheyne's complaint," he muttered, with a curling lip, "and am

becoming the timid child, frightened at its own shadow. This will not do, now," he added, apostrophizing himself—"the eyes on the foe, and the face to the battle—courage in one's self, and faith in one's God! It has been always my creed, and it will last to the death."

He went on, with his head erect and his hands clenched; his step rang firmly in the hall, as the servant admitted him, and barred the door after him.

"Where is Mr. Stone, James?"

"In the drawing-room, sir."

Geoffrey Stone proceeded thither at once, and found his father slowly pacing up and down the room.

"Is the church cleared yet, Geoffrey?"

"I believe so; there was no noise when I came in a moment since, and the lights were turned out in the church."

"Hark! the people are singing in the streets about us."

They listened, and the words of some ribald song in which their names were coupled, drifted to their ears in that quiet drawing-room.

“And this is the reward for doing our duty!” said the elder Stone, with some degree of bitterness; “this is the people’s appreciation of our earnestness.”

“This is our *earthly* reward,” gently replied the curate.

“It is hard—but they’ll find me harder!” cried the passionate old man. “It is not all this turbulence—seconded as it is by a few puritanical bigots, and tacitly encouraged as it is by those members of our church who should support us—that will make me flinch?”

“In the right cause, it is no man’s duty to give way.”

“And I will not!” said the incumbent. “Weak as I feel, I am still too strong to yield; and when you are incumbent here, I have little fear that the vulgar outcry of

Puseyism will shake your hopes in a better day for the Church."

"I will do my best."

"We are in the right—are we not sure of it?"

"Let me for one instant be assured we are wrong, and I preach no more at St. Jude's!" said the curate, with excitement. "I take my shame and my trouble far hence!"

"But you"—began the surprised father.

"But I am firm as a rock!" returned the curate. "I have set up my standard, and I die at its foot before I leave it in the hands of my enemies! I have begun, and I go on. Could I begin life again, with all that has passed for example, I might think more like Martin Chester."

"You—*you*, Geoffrey!"

"I do not know: the past can never return, and this is the talk of a visionary. Still, when you and I, father, settled in this town—if we could have seen at

that time the cruel opposition that would ensue, and the scandal brought by that opposition on the Church, we might have hesitated in a few of those outward signs, which, after all, are not absolutely necessary to salvation. I say, we might have done so—God alone knows!”

Geoffrey Stone went supperless to his room a few moments after that assertion, and left his father full of speculation. ‘Could it be possible that Geoffrey, his iron-willed son—to whom he had himself succumbed—was giving way?’ thought the old man. ‘Was the world to say, these Stones were in the wrong, and we—the noisy, blasphemous, benighted idiots—were in the right?’ He could not think so; but, until that night, he had never heard his beloved son discuss the subject in so strange a manner.

The incumbent was right. Geoffrey Stone had no thought of giving up his prejudices; and Geoffrey Stone himself could hardly have

accounted for his sentiments of that evening. On the one subject he was not always inclined to think so generously: had any one else expressed such an opinion, he would—a day, an hour hence—have considered it as an attack against himself. Was it the relaxation of his nerves?—or had the bitter fruits of this continued opposition shown themselves more plainly to him that night? Had there been held before him, as by some mysterious hand, all that he, with his talents, his religious earnestness, his desire to do good, might have effected, and rose there to appall him the hideous reverse of the picture, and all the evil passions and irreverence that had grown with his persistence, and been the result of his preaching? He could have wept, in the solitude of his chamber, tears of bitter mortification—tears akin to repentance.

He went to the window, and flung it open, and let in the warm summer air. The night was still, and the noise in the

streets was dying out. He extinguished his light, and sat down in the shadow of the curtain, leaning one arm on the window-sill. The bells of St. Jude's chimed the half hour past nine, as he rested his weary head upon his hand, and sank deep, deep in his own gloomy thoughts. Passing from the past and the present to a speculative future, and finding little brightness there—passing further and further on the unknown sea.

In his youth, fresh from his college studies, full of faith in his work, and ambitious enough to believe in his success, he had pictured a future very different to that at which he sat and gazed now. He had seen himself distinguished from the crowd, and sharing the honours awarded to the Church. He had even hoped that some far-off day a mitre would rest upon his gray hairs, and be the crowning reward for a long profitable life spent faithfully in the cause of his great Master. But now—ah,

NOW ! There before him lay his real future—and he could believe in it, and forget all his past dreams. With every day some new enemy, some unflinching opponent ; gaining here and there, perhaps, a convert to his peculiar views, but winning no souls for his Creator, and losing esteem amongst men. True, a few of his old college friends might remember him, and a few Tractarian disciples stand by him ; but the world—the great world he had hoped to gather fame in—would pass by and hold his teaching in contempt. He saw all that now ; he felt that no attempt to revive practices grown obsolete could be adopted without danger, without even aiding the cause of Satan amongst ignorant or unthoughtful men. He had shut his eyes to that fact, and gone blindly onwards, and perhaps many a lost soul would cry out to him, “ Deceiver ! ” when the gates of life were closed eternally. I say he *felt* that, in those thoughtful

moments—but he would not dwell upon it, or let that awful impression rest too long there. He looked only to his future life, and what a stern persistence in his course—the right course—would eventually produce.

True, he should be married; there would be one friend at his side to strengthen him in his faith and encourage him in his efforts to fight in the very face of despair. Ah! one friend—Margaret Cheyne, daughter of Lady Cheyne, of Haselton House, near Tenchester. He sighed as he thought of her. Once he shivered, and buttoned his coat across his chest, as though the night-air were too cold for him. Still he sat there, and the shadows on the picture deepened as he thought of his married life. Would that life alleviate his sadness, or add to his discomfiture? Should he in the heart of his home find the happiness

denied him beyond it ; and would the smiles, the love of Margaret make him much amends. Married life was not always conducive to happiness—there was the case of Martin Chester and his wife. Martin Chester and his wife had begun life well, and lo ! one turn of the wheel of fortune, and they were separated ! With such a wife as Ada Chester, he should have imagined Martin's life a heaven : with such a wife, truly good, truly religious, a man had no right not to feel content. Life is strangely regulated. If Martin had married Miss Cheyne now—her gentle, submissive manners, her patience, her aptitude to place implicit trust in others, would have made Martin Chester's life a different one ; and if he had married Ada—ah ! what made his heart beat so wildly at the thought ? God forgive him—he knew it all now—he was a coward and a traitor, and

unstable as water ! God forgive him for the evil in his soul—he was as miserable a sinner as any who had entered St. Jude's that night for the express purpose of reviling him. He let his arms fall despairingly on the window-sill, and buried his head in them ; he would pray to be forgiven his trespasses, as he forgave—freely forgave—those who had injured him and wished him harm. He shed a few scalding tears, and no one but his God and himself knew that the strong man's heart had been touched so deeply that night. Presently all was quiet—his grief and his prayers had ended, and the curate still retained his despairing posture, with the night air blowing on him, and the bright stars looking on. St. Jude's struck ten, chimed the quarter and the thirty minutes past, and he either slept or thought all that time, and did not raise his head or look towards

St. Jude's again till the three-quarter bells were ringing out.

Then he started, and clutched the window-sill, and looked with straining eyes across the garden. A light within the church, and for a brief second the shadow, as it were, of a man rapidly crossing the window near the communion. Danger abroad in the dark night, and he idling time at the window — great danger — he was sure of it!

The window was not many feet from the ground, and he was six feet two. The whole house was asleep, and there might be no reason for awakening his father, whose nights were often far too restless. He stepped through the window, hung from the sill a moment, and then dropped on the hard gravel beneath. He had a pass-key through the vestry to the church, and he ran at a rapid pace towards the back entrance of St. Jude's. He

remembered afterwards letting the key drop from his hand as he ran, and the painful moment of suspense spent in groping for it amongst the dank graveyard grass. He found the key at last, and hastened to the vestry-door which he strove twice to unlock; he stood for a moment baffled, then he essayed the handle of the door, and found it turn to his touch. He was not deceived, then—some one was in the church! He opened the door, hesitated a moment, and then went boldly in. Into the vestry, cautiously but fearlessly, and fully prepared to grapple with the first intruder in the sacred precincts of St. Jude's.

Suddenly he stopped. There was a slight noise in the direction of the door by which he had just entered, and, as he turned, he became aware of the figure of a man stealthily crouching towards it, and making for the churchyard.

“Stop!” thundered the curate, and the

man leaped from the vestry and ran, followed by Geoffrey.

Having the start, the man would have got away unrecognized, had it not been for the graves, over one of which he stumbled in his eagerness to escape. That stumble almost cost him his capture, for the hand of Geoffrey Stone was on his collar when he turned and fought for it.

"You are my prisoner, Samuel Burles, and you shall not escape!"

The man made no answer, but struck out fiercely with his right hand, and then closed with his opponent. A short struggle, the men swaying to and fro amongst the graves, stumbling over them and treading them down—was it Fate that brought those two men always together in conflict?

Whether desperation at his perilous position gave Sam Burles the superiority, or whether the curate's strength had failed him somewhat since the little skirmish in

Pleasant Street, certain it is that Geoffrey Stone found himself at last the under man in the conflict.

"Will you let me go, parson?" muttered Sam, between his teeth.

"Not till I see you in a prison. Help, there!"

Sam Burles raised his clenched fist, and struck with all his force at the wrist of the curate, whose fingers instantly relaxed as though a sledge-hammer had fallen on them. Sam Burles looked at his fallen foe, then leaped away from the clutch of the left hand, and, with a frightful oath, turned and fled again.

The curate sprung to his feet and ran a little way in pursuit; but the pain in his arm compelled him to stop and content himself with watching the receding form of Sam Burles making for his father's garden, the wall of which he leaped a moment afterwards with the agility of a cat.

As the curate stopped, two gentlemen came running towards him—one a stranger, the other his old opponent, Mr. Grimley.

“Bless my soul, Mr. Stone!” ejaculated the churchwarden, “is anything the matter?”

“The matter is, sir, that the church has been broken into.”

“Broken into!—did you recognize the man?”

“I think so.”

“And he?”

“And his name I will mention to the proper authorities,” said the curate, coldly; for he could not shake off the impression of antagonism to Mr. Grimley even at such a moment. He turned towards the vestry again, the gentleman and the churchwarden accompanying him; and before they had entered the church a constable had joined them.

“Anything the matter, Mr. Stone?” asked the policeman, touching his hat.

"Yes," said the curate, stepping into the vestry. From the vestry into the church, and then back again with a quick start, for the church was full of smoke, and some curling tongues of flames were rising from one or two of the pews underneath the pulpit.

"*The church is on fire!*" cried Geoffrey, and "The church is on fire!" was echoed by his companions, one of whom—the official—ran into the churchyard and sprang his rattle noisily.

"Where is Harton?" said the curate; "he has the keys of the engine-house."

"I'll see to that, Mr. Stone," said the churchwarden; "we shall have an engine quicker than the parish one from our warehouses in High Street. Mr. Stone, whatever may be our differences, whatever may be my opinion as to the first unhappy cause of this catastrophe, I trust you will believe I feel as deeply as yourself this great enormity, and

that I work with you to discover the perpetrator of the crime."

He extended his hand frankly; and the curate, a trifle thawed by the old gentleman's manner, took his hand and thanked him for the offer of his assistance. Mr. Grimley remembered that friendly act between them to his dying day, and was glad that they had shaken hands, and felt towards each other something of a better feeling, the night St. Jude's was burnt down to the ground.

Yes, burnt to the ground—the stronghold of Tractarianism, which the Stones had perverted from its old faith, and made more of a show and less of a sanctuary than in the time of their more simple-minded predecessor—that old, stone, time-eaten edifice, whose ivy-covered steeple had stood against the blue sky long before the place was a great town, and when a few wooden huts and some overhanging Harry the Eighth

houses had clustered together and been christened Tenchester.

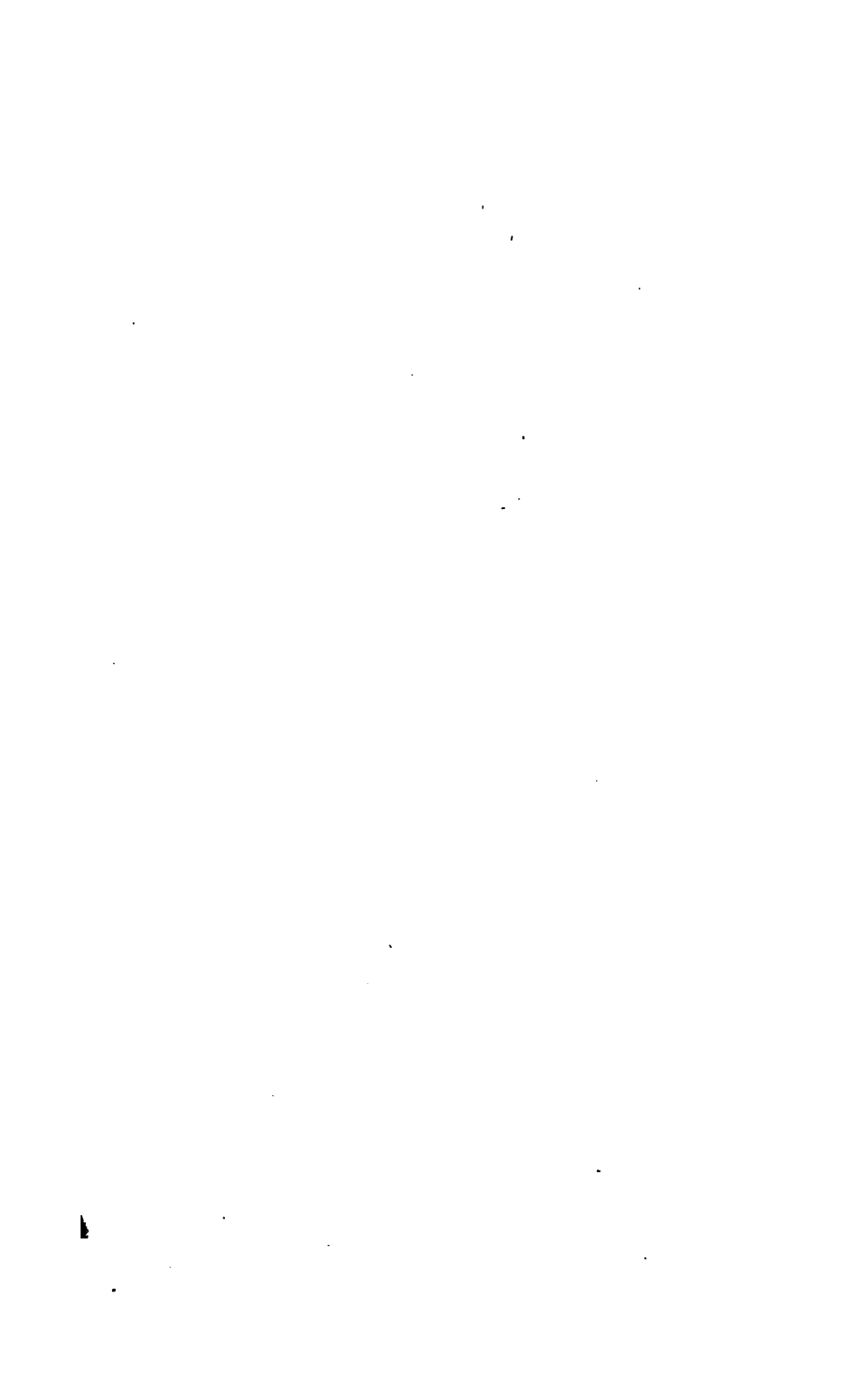
Burnt to the ground, despite the speedy arrival of Chester, Grimley and Chester's fire-engine, followed, at a more leisurely rate, by a bumping, hump-backed engine belonging to the parish, that took half-an-hour to get ready, and an hour and a half to persuade to play in any direction but the wrong.

Burnt to the ground—that is, all appertaining to a church, save the stones which slowly crumbled to pieces day by day, and the steeple, which a surveyor afterwards declared dangerous, and which had to be cautiously taken down. Burnt to the ground, with all Tenchester for witness, and the broad glare of the flames lighting up a mob of wild, excited faces; with voices yelling out it was God's judgment on the Popish practices, and with the quiet, holy stars looking down upon the turmoil.

Burnt to the ground, with the curate and his father standing at the parsonage-door, and the fire-flakes falling round them; with the servants very busy inside taking down blinds and muslin curtains, and anything that might ignite from the heat of the great fire across the way.

The wind turned at an early hour of the fire, and blew the flames and sparks in an opposite direction to the parsonage, and kept a roof above the heads of the incumbent and his son for the little while longer that they needed one.

END OF THE THIRD PART.



PART THE FOURTH.

1

CHAPTER I.

BURLES SENIOR RAMPANT

THE law kept very quiet, and talked little of the incendiary act that had made St. Jude's a blackened ruin. Secret spies were about, and secret wheels were turning in many directions; but few in Tenchester guessed that a malicious hand had fired the church. The Reverend Geoffrey Stone retained his own counsel, and, save one slight interview with the police-officer at his bedside (for he was ill and weak next day, and was not allowed to talk much), he mentioned

not, even to his father, the struggle in the churchyard. Two nights after the fire, however, there arrived, by a late London train, a tall, loose-limbed, gipsy-faced individual, in company with two lynx-eyed gentlemen, one of whom had kindly hand-cuffed his wrist to that of Samuel Burles.

Every man is innocent till he is found guilty. There was only a vague statement of Mr. Geoffrey Stone's,—just sufficient, at present, to sully a little the fair fame of Samuel Burles—save and except the remembrance of some hasty words uttered over a supper-table at the “Peaceful Rest,” and to which words a young lady with a black eye offered “to take her bible oath on!”

Samuel Burles, Esq., was taken to Tenchester gaol for greater security, and an examination promised for the morrow; but man proposes, &c.,—the Reverend Geoffrey Stone was still too unwell to attend, and the prisoner, sullen and unexamined, was

remanded for three days, and taken back, heartily wishing that some convenient fever or paralysis might take Mr. Stone, junior, to a world where he would be better off, and more out of the way.

On the first day of Sam's remand, Martin Chester, sitting in his private manager's room, was apprised of a visitor waiting below in the warehouse.

"I am busy," was the short response of Martin; "the gentleman must see Mr. Frank Chester, or Mr. Grimley."

The clerk coughed.

"I'll tell him so, sir. It's—it's hardly a gentleman, sir."

Martin was not the easy-tempered man the reader has known at an early period of this history, and he motioned very impatiently towards the door with the feather of his pen. The clerk retired, and Martin resumed his toil up that long hill of accounts, which spread over sheet after sheet of his cash-

book, and kept his calculating powers in full play. Another knock at the door, responded to by a muttered curse from Martin.

"Come in!" he said, at last, prepared to warmly receive the intruder, who, however, proved to be his brother Frank.

"Frank, Frank, you know this is against the rules," expostulated Martin; "and you know if anything tries my temper, and makes me more of a brute than another, it is interruption in business hours. Now, what is it?"

"Well, it's something rather important, Martin, or I wouldn't have risked a pound-and-a-half inkstand at my head," said Frank. "It's poor old Burles wants to see you about his son."

"I have done with the scamp."

"So I delicately hinted to the father," said Frank; "but he will have it you can help him with a little advice—perhaps with a little money; and as the poor old fellow

is suffering from great excitement, 'it may be charity to see him."

"I can do no good. Why should other men's troubles be thrust upon me?"

"You have been more of a friend to the Burles's, perhaps, than anybody in the town."

"I have given them a little money."

"You have given them kind words, and they were less used to them than your shillings."

"Oh, let the old man come up. I can do him no good, give him no advice; but if he will not go away without seeing me, the sooner this interview is over the better."

Frank retired, and shortly afterwards his brisk step was heard again in the passage, followed by a hasty, impatient tread, very unlike Mr. Burles's usual shuffle.

"That's the door, old gentleman," said Frank's voice; "you'll find my brother within there. Be as brief as you can, for time is pressing."

"Ay, time is pressing," said the deep voice without.

"And you needn't be quite so down already, Burles," said Frank, less brusquely. "Your son may come off with flying colours."

There was no reply, and a heavy hand on the panel sounded a moment afterwards.

The usual response from within, and then Burles, senior, walked into the room of Martin Chester, and uncovered his gray hairs. At all times a striking figure of an athletic old man who gave but few signs of the winter's decay, he presented on that morning an appearance that would have attracted the most casual observer. By walking uprightly, and flinging his head back defiantly, he had got rid of his stoop occasioned by basket-making, and his form was erect, and seemed as powerful as his son's. Martin would have hardly known

him again to look into his face, expressive as it was of so much fierceness and determination.

"Well, Burles?" was Martin's salutation.

"I ha' coom at a busy toime, I hear," said the old man; "and sorry enough I be to trooble a man in his own house. But moine's a hard case, and I warnt your advice upon it."

"Concerning Sam?"

"Sam it be—*who* else can it be?"

"He has been a trouble to you all your life—it would have been better for you, Burles, if you had parted with him earlier."

"It would ha' been better for me, and ten times betterer for him, if he had died when he wor swinging at his gipsy mother's back—if God had been good to him and tooked him earlier," cried Burles; "I moightn't have thought so once, but I can see it all now—plain!"

•

"I suppose there is little doubt of his guilt, Burles?"

"The parson knows too much—it's that darmed parson who ha' always been the rock-a-head to my boy. On his word depends poor Sam's life, perhaps—if he could only die now in his bed, I wouldn't be sorry for one! I prayed for it last night, and if it doan't come true it be the last prayer I'll ever utter."

"There's one thing you forget, Burles, in your impiety," said Martin—"that all the evil that has happened, and all the trouble to which you are a sufferer, originates from your son, and not from Geoffrey Stone. Your son has followed his own bad courses, gone swiftly to ruin, and finished with a frightful deed,—you have no right to charge the sin or the misfortune on any but himself."

"Ay, but I have," said the man, doggedly.

“ On whom ? ”

“ I say again on the parson. If ever there wor an evil genus—I ha’ read of genuses in books—that Geoffrey Stone’s my son’s and moine. He tooked our home from us when we wor comfortable for life, and it wor promised us for life, and pitches us into the streets—he locks my boy up for an aggrawated assault, when it wor ony his high spirits that got the better on him for a moment—and so he makes him bad, and keeps him bad, and does his worst to spile the very little soul he has. And now it’s him as is going to say, ‘ I saw your son set fire to the church ; ’ and if he says so, Sam ’ll be transported for all his miserable life.”

“ Mr. Stone will only state the truth.”

“ How do you know that ? ” fiercely cried Burles ; “ he ha’ a spite agin the boy ; and do you think a black coat never coovered a black heart—I know better ! I

know that Sam ha' crossed his life too often for him to lose this chance of ruining him—body and soul; and I say once more," with a thump of a thick hawthorn stick on the floor, "that if God doan't answer last night's prayer of moine, I'll never pray to Him agin!"

"Have you seen Mr. Stone?"

"I tried to see him, but he wor ill. I didn't press it, for I knew what he wor: he wouldn't save my boy from prison when I went there last, and I might as well talk to a rock. If he'd been burning in his church last Sunday, and could on'y ha' been let out by saying, 'I forgive Sam Burles,' he'd ha' fried hisselt to death!"

"He is certainly a firm man," said Martin, dryly.

"If there's a judgment anywhere aboov, he'll repent it yet, minister as he be."

Martin began to fidget nervously with his pen. He had an objection to blustering man-

iers and loud voices, more especially when the speakers were in the wrong. He had no love for Geoffrey Stone; but he had lost all interest in Samuel Burles. The man had acted like a coward; and if he had fired the church, it was a dastardly act, for which he would be glad to see him suffer. Martin expressed that wish to Richard Burles, and the man's face darkened at once.

"You, too, glad to hear he wor condemned!" he said. "I didn't think it on you, Mr. Chester!"

"If he be guilty, understand me," said Martin; "and guilty I believe he is. I have no sympathy with incendiaries."

"If he be guilty, he wor druv to it!—and guilty he bean't. There's on'y one man's word for it, and he be as full of venom as a serpent!"

"How do you know there is Geoffrey Stone's word for it?"

"There must be, or Stone couldn't be a

witness. But"—giving his head a fierce shake—"I didn't think it on you, to say you would be glad to hear the boy wor lagged for life. I allus thought you the Burles's friend—so did Sam. You weren't like this once; you used to feel for misery like ourn."

"Perhaps I have got harder. Seeing so much deceit and crime in the world, makes one hard, Richard Burles."

"Ay—hard it be!"

"You will understand me, old man, that, for the shame brought on your gray hairs, I can feel still; that for the striking down of all your hopes in your son, I am truly sorry; and that your up-hill work to keep your son good, and all your life-long sacrifices for his sake, have earned my deep respect. If there be no training a wild beast, and if your efforts have been misdirected though well-meant, you are not to blame."

"I doan't want your respect, and you may

keep your feelings to yourself," said Burles, shortly.

"I make every allowance for your natural excitement, but care not to sit here calmly and be insulted. Good morning."

"Good morning it be to you," said Burles, thrusting on his rabbit-skin cap; "and no thanks to you, either. I did not tell you that I saw old Stone this morning, and that I foond him loike his son. I couldn't touch his feelings—an old man with but one son, like myself, and as fond of his cub, perhaps, as if it wor worth anything. I couldn't touch him, I say; but I turned away here, thinking there wor one who'd give me a good word, and, p'raps, put me in the right way to do the best for Sam—for my head ain't steady-like, with all this bother!"

He put his large-veined hand to his forehead for a moment, and the action touched Martin. He had grown a cold, stern man; but he had sympathy with any one whose

hopes had been centred on one object, which to lose was to bring down on the sufferer the crushing weight of despair.

"Burles, I have no right to pre-judge the case—have no right to consider your son guilty till his trial. Any advice I can give you, pray command. Any pecuniary assistance—"

"I ha' done with you," said Burles, sternly; "I give up foine folks from to-day—they be all false, and one's no better nor another. You nor any loike you ever felt for poor benighted chaps loike us—you fling your money at us now and then, but you doan't feel for us, and only think what a fine thing it is to be charitable and good. Tell your class o' people to come more often amongst ours, if any good's intended—we doan't want to be preached to, or helped at a long distance. I woan't ha' your advice now."

"Very well."

Martin commenced writing.

"I'll act for myself, and Sam shan't wornt help, or some one to speak up for him. There's ony one standing up for him in the world, but he be a high spirit, and his heart's sound for his boy. It bean't money, it bean't life wull stop me. Good morning to you, sir."

Burles marched out of the room, and slammed the door after him with a violence that shook every window in the house, and made its crazy parts wheeze again with the shock.

Old Burles went down the stairs with the same impatient tread that he had ascended them, and passed through the counting-house, where the clerks were. His excitement had not decreased, and his disturbed imagination attributed to some quiet glances over the account-books a desire to insult him, by looks contemptuous or disparaging. He stopped in the middle of the office and rapped his stick on the floor again.

“Yes, sirs, Sam Burles’s father it be,” he shouted, “and there’s nothing to be ashamed on in that, let people say what they wull, or look how they loike. Has anybody here anything to say agin it?”

No one had anything to say. The fierce looks of old Burles, and the emphatic manner in which he clutched his stick, did not invite discussion; so, after pausing for a reply, Burles went on again, and passed through the the swing glass-doors into the street.

A thinly-clad young woman, with a pale face and red swollen eyes, was waiting for him outside—came towards him, and took his arm.

“What luck, father?”

“Father it bean’t—but thankee, Jenny, it’s kind. I understand what you mean, lass.”

“What does Mr. Chester say?”

“That he thinks Sam guilty, and shall be glad to hear of ill happening to him.

That be the consolation I got there. He ha' not been a happy man, and moight ha' felt for a man struck down loike me. He will want consolation for himself some day, when he's struck down harder than he be!"

Was this prophecy?

CHAPTER II.

MARGARET STRIKES FOR ADA.

IF there were any topic likely to affect the good people of Tenchester at this period, besides the burning of St. Jude's, it was a rumour current in the town of the dissolution of partnership between Chester, Grimley and Chester. At any other period, news of the latter description would have excited the townsfolk to a frenzy; but one idea at a time was always sufficient for them. The church conflagration, the news of the arrest of Samuel Burles, and the probable result of his first examination

next Friday, added to the illness of the Reverend Geoffrey Stone, afforded little opportunity to discuss the reasons for the intended withdrawal of Martin Chester's name from the firm.

People heard Mr. Chester was tired of business and thought of going abroad, with little concern for Martin, or the state of his affairs—probably he had quarrelled with Mr. Grimley or his brother; more probably still, he would be glad to be farther away from the wife in whom he had been so deceived.

The rumour was true enough; Martin Chester had grown tired of life at Tenchester, and was anxious to leave the scene of his cares. He had tried to forget every thing in business, and reduce himself to a hard, inflexible, calculating machine; and though he had been partially successful, he had derived little comfort from the result. His heart had been deadened, but it was just as

heavy, and in the first moment of relaxation how keen was his memory !

The rumour had reached Haselton House, and warned the new champion in Ada's cause that there was no time to spare, if she had any efforts to make to engender better feelings in Martin for his wife. Margaret had been no more dilatory in Ada's case, than Ada Chester in hers, but each was silently waiting for the very best opportunity, and planning steadily each other's future happiness. In the attempt of each of these young women to forget her own cares, and work for the other, there was something heroic and touching ; and there was no small strangeness at last in the great effort to bring about the crisis, happening the same day. Strange eventful day to more than Margaret and Ada, beginning and ending so darkly, despite all efforts, and bringing with it so heavy a chain of complication, all tending to one end and embracing within its folds so many people with

whom the reader has connection—there was something higher, greater, more divine than chance in that day. All that happened, we have a right to believe, was wisely ordered for some purpose; and if, in our narrow comprehension, we still wonder why this transpired, or wherefore that occurred, we must have faith to think it God's will, and submit.

Margaret Cheyne heard the rumour of Martin going abroad from her mother, who had picked it up from the housekeeper, who had a cousin in the firm of Chester, Grimley, and Chester. Margaret saw there was no time to be lost—a curious intricate *feminine* plan that she had nearly elaborated must be given up now, and she must strike at the root of the evil at once. Early that very evening—the last day, the reader will be pleased to bear in mind, before the examination of Sam Burles—Miss Cheyne, apprising no one of her object, set forth with the intention of calling on Martin at his office. She would

have preferred some other means, for the very thought of entering the offices in High Street, where she might come face to face with Frank Chester, set her cheek flushing and her heart beating. Still it was her duty now, and thoughts of her own peculiar position did not check her. However, that embarrassment was spared her, for half way to the town she met with the object of her search. He was advancing at a rapid pace, with the old frown on his face, and the old downward look at his feet. So intent was he in his own thoughts, that he would have passed Miss Cheyne without recognizing her, had she not stopped, and extended her hand towards him.

“Good evening, Mr. Chester.”

He started at the voice, looked up, and raised his hat.

“Good evening, Miss Cheyne.”

There was some hesitation in his manner ; he seemed reluctant to stop, even for a mo-

ment, to exchange civilities with his old friend—with Frank's old love.

"Miss Cheyne will pardon my abruptness," said he, after a moment's pause, "but I am pressed for time, and have a long journey before me. I trust Lady Cheyne is well."

Martin had a long journey before him, though it was a journey without an object—one of those purposeless fatiguing walks across country which he had adopted of late, for the purpose of distracting his thoughts by something like action, and with the hope of returning wearily to his chamber, where sheer exhaustion would bring him a sound sleep.

"Lady Cheyne is well, and I am sorry to detain you, Mr. Chester, but I have something very important to communicate—something which was directing my steps to your place of business in High Street."

"Indeed!" said Martin.

"You will allow me to accompany you

a little way upon your journey," said Margaret earnestly.

"If it be Miss Cheyne's wish," said he, offering his arm; "but I fear she will find me but a dull companion."

Miss Cheyne accepted his escort, and walked by the side of Martin Chester, preparing for the attack on that formidable fortress in which his better feelings were immured. Martin was the first to speak; and his observation, cold and decisive as it was, opened the subject that he was desirous of keeping sealed for ever.

"You will pardon me, but I can scarcely imagine, Miss Cheyne, any sufficient reason for your seeking me. My change of pursuits and my change of life, shut me out from society, and make the presence of past friends a painful ordeal to endure. I am a Timon of Tenchester, fit alone for the company of

myself, and peculiarly unfit for the company of ladies."

"But I consider I have a sufficient reason for intruding on you, Mr. Chester—I—"

"One moment, Miss Cheyne, and your pardon again for interrupting you," quickly said Martin; "but I need not assure Miss Cheyne that there is one subject for ever closed between me and my friends. Whatever relates to Mrs. Chester," he added, with a violent effort, "can exert no influence on me, and forms a subject on which I will *not* listen."

"And yet to listen might be to save you much of present misery, and more of future remorse."

"Impossible."

"Might be to dissipate many clouds of error, and to prepare the way for hope and happiness."

"A fair inducement to listen," said Martin, with a curling lip; "but I have

done with fancy pictures, and am living in a real world now. I am tired of illusions."

They were near Haselton House again, and Martin stopped near the lodge-gates.

"With your permission, I will not further detain you, Miss Cheyne."

"Mr. Chester, you must hear me," said Margaret, passionately, "there is another life besides yours for me to think of—another living in the real world too, if crushed hopes and bitter disappointments form it. I shall not leave you unless you thrust me from you."

"Oh! I am too much honoured by the company of Miss Cheyne to behave quite so discourteously," said he, satirically. "I must listen under protest, Miss Cheyne, and I must warn you of a callous listener."

They proceeded again, and the undaunted girl retained her hand on the arm of Martin Chester, and kept pace with him.

Very grave and stern looked Martin Chester by the side of the flushed and excited girl, and yet very patiently he listened, and bore the sound of the name once so beloved to him.

"I will not detain you a great while," began Margaret, "only the urgency of the case compels me to speak in defiance of your wish. I feel that both you and your wife are the victims of error, and that I may have power to throw a little light on the true state of Mrs. Chester's feelings. That Ada Chester knows not of my intention to seek you out and would have also interdicted me, speaks of the cruel pride that keeps you both apart."

"For ever apart!"

They were the echo of his own words on that fatal morning. He felt even the appeal of Miss Cheyne had not weakened their meaning.

"Not for ever apart, Mr. Chester. I

pray earnestly, solemnly not. I see no reason for so cruel and unnatural a separation—for the breaking of a vow pledged to God when you were married. I believe the unworthy reasons that separated you both exist not, or can be easily surmounted. I am sure it only requires a little effort of the strong will you boast of—an effort in the right direction, however,—to work as much good as it has evil.”

“No,” was the short response.

“Mr. Chester, if there be no diminution of love in your heart, as I am sure there is not of that love which your wife evinced before the unhappy differences between you, all else must give way before it. Your wife is unhappy in her solitude; there have been a few errors on both sides—hers she acknowledges to be the greatest.”

“Ha!”

“And she has suffered most, for she cannot find open to her a hundred means for

thoughts' distraction. You cruelly mistrusted her, Mr. Chester, and the false step you made in consequence was resented with all a woman's pride. A few kind words, less jealousy, language more temperate and dignified—less dictatorial—would have saved you and her many long months of self-torture. You will listen now?—I have learned to love your wife with all a sister's love—I plead for her happiness with all a sister's energy."

"Go on, Miss Cheyne. I listen."

But Margaret had paused, for round the bend of the road came another stern and pale-faced man, the Reverend Geoffrey Stone, curate of a tottering steeple and a few black calcinable stones. Margaret had heard from the page, who had been sent from Haselton House to the parsonage, that Mr. Stone was better, but she had not expected to meet him out of doors. She coloured at seeing him, for she remembered her own

confession to Ada on Sunday last, and of the vague hopes held out that she might yet be spared blighting his life and hers. She was glad to see him again, and looking almost as well as ever, but she felt that Martin's resolve was not to linger for an instant. If she left Martin's side, farewell to the ground she had gained and the patient listening her companion had promised her.

The Reverend Geoffrey Stone, who had witnessed from a distance the appeal of his betrothed to Martin, and was perplexed thereat, raised his hat as he advanced, and glanced from Mr. Chester to Miss Cheyne. He had at least expected Miss Cheyne to stop, and the blood mounted to his face at the simple bend of the head which she bestowed in a confused manner as she passed him. He noticed the studied intentness with which Martin Chester looked away from him, and he fancied the features of the young

merchant expressed, very strangely for him, a certain amount of discomposure. It was rather mysterious; and, when he had passed them and proceeded some few yards, he turned and looked after them. Margaret Cheyne was talking earnestly again, and looking up into Martin's face with the same appealing gaze which had already struck him as singular in a young lady usually so cold and apathetic, and the same position was preserved as she and Mr. Chester turned the curve of the road.

Geoffrey Stone was not of a suspicious nature, but there was a something there he could not fathom. He was not jealous; he felt no anger against Miss Cheyne or Martin Chester, only perplexed to account for their appearance together, and the nature of the discourse that could disturb them both so much. He was hurt, too, in no small degree; the lady who was to be married to him might have condescended to acknowledge his pre-

sence in the country lanes with less precipitancy—might have even expressed her satisfaction at seeing him well again, before she had continued her walk with a man he particularly disliked. Still Lady Cheyne would account for all this; doubtless Martin had called at Haselton House for Miss Cheyne—the mystery would be solved in a few minutes; for Haselton House was the object of his walk, only he had strayed a few yards out of his way to see a sick member of his flock. So he and his lady-love went opposite ways in life, and never met again!

CHAPTER III.

ADA STRIKES FOR MARGARET.

THE Reverend Geoffrey Stone received no satisfaction at Haselton House. He found Lady Cheyne at home, and was greeted with the usual warmth. Lady Cheyne did not exactly know where Margaret had gone, extremely regretted her absence, and thought the curate of Tenchester would find her eventually at Mrs. Chester's villa near the town. Margaret thought it very likely that after her visit to Tenchester she should go on to Mrs. Chester's; indeed, if she were not home at nine in the evening,

the carriage was to be sent to fetch her home. Lady Cheyne thought it would be a good opportunity for Mr. Stone to proceed to Mrs. Chester's, and thence escort Margaret home. The Reverend Geoffrey Stone with great gravity thought so too, and rose to withdraw more quickly than Lady Cheyne desired, for she wanted a long talk about the church and Sam Burles, and to-morrow's examination and her nervous complaint, and Mr. Stone's late ailments.

Geoffrey Stone left Haselton House with a more thoughtful countenance than he had even entered it. He had proceeded thither for a solution to his perplexities, and the little he had heard from Lady Cheyne had somehow added to them. Margaret had informed her mother of an intention to visit Tenchester, and he had met her with Martin Chester proceeding in a contrary direction; then Lady Cheyne was entirely ignorant of Martin being in the vicinity! Still he was

not jealous; he had not a bad idea of human nature, and he believed there were valid reasons for Margaret walking alone with Martin Chester. Margaret evidently intended to visit Mrs. Chester—he would walk slowly towards Mrs. Chester's house and meet her there. It was always better to proceed to the fountain-head at once.

The Reverend Geoffrey Stone sauntered leisurely onwards, wishing it were any other house than Mrs. Chester's to which his steps were tending. He had an objection to enter that house now—he felt there was danger, even to a certain extent, temptation. Since that Sunday night when he had sat at the open window of his chamber, and mercilessly barred his own heart, he felt he had thought too little of Margaret Cheyne, and too much of Ada Chester. It was a sad humiliating truth, but he was powerful enough to combat it and keep it down—"never to be known," he said, "but to

himself and his Maker." It was an awful truth to resist and come off the victor. It was a wicked passion and the work of the devil, and his own love of what was just and good would aid him in his efforts to prove to Margaret Cheyne how devoted a lover he was, and how fond and faithful a husband he would make.

Geoffrey Stone would have preferred keeping the fair face of Mrs. Chester at a distance for a few weeks—even until the marriage, which the calamity at St. Jude's had deferred for a little while—but he could not remain in suspense concerning his future wife. And it was strange he should feel amidst his anxiety an undefinable, wild sort of pleasure, with every step that took him nearer to his journey's end. He essayed to shake it off—he thought of the church of St. Jude's, of to-morrow's examination, of everything but the motive for his purposed visit, and yet his heart would beat

more fast, and something flutter at his temples.

When within two or three hundred yards of Mrs. Chester's residence, he stopped, and looked back across the country. He would give his Margaret time to reach Mrs. Chester's before him ; for slowly as he had walked, if Miss Cheyne had gone much further on the opposite road with her companion, it was a matter of doubt if she had reached her destination. There was no occasion for hurry ; he would lean his back against the stile, and admire the landscape for five minutes. The mantle of evening was rapidly descending over the scene, and touching, with a dusky gray, corn-fields and meadow-land, and the mass of house-roof to the west. He thought how strange the blackened tower of St. Jude's looked from where he stood, and what a grand, stately old ruin it was to the last. He would take that ruin as a type of himself, hemmed in on every side by pre-

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judice, but still erect in his pride, though scathed by the fierceness of the attack. He might be weakened and inclined to fall, but his fall would be great, and his faith would not fall with him.

Even as he stood there, he thought of the new church rising from the ashes of the old, and of the cruel feud beginning anew between his father, himself, and the townspeople. It was a sad thought, looking across the darkening landscape, and he felt troubled. He did not care to dwell too long upon such a probability that night—besides, it was getting late; the air was cold, and all the peaceful stars were out above him, and seemed looking down reproof.

He walked on to the villa, and in a few moments afterwards was ushered into the presence of Mrs. Chester, who was seated at her desk, looking over some old letters by the light of the table-lamp. With the light full on her face, which bore the traces of some

past excitement, the Reverend Geoffrey Stone thought he had never seen her look more beautiful.

Ada crowded the letters into her desk—painful reading had they been, for they were old love-letters of Martin's before his faith had been shaken—and rose to receive her visitor.

“You will pardon my intrusion, Mrs. Chester, at this hour of the evening,” said he, bending over her extended hand, “but I am here in the character of an esquire to a lady who I fear has not arrived yet.”

“You mean Miss Cheyne?”

The curate responded in the affirmative.

“Miss Cheyne certainly informed me that she would favour me with a visit this evening, but I fear the hour is too late. Twenty minutes to nine,” said Ada, glancing towards the time-piece on the mantel-shelf—that time-piece which had checked off sixty slow minutes for Martin Chester once! “I can scarcely

remember Miss Cheyne calling at an hour so late."

"But you had Miss Cheyne's word, Mrs. Chester?"

"She said she would call if nothing prevented her; it is possible she may be detained at home."

She was detained, but not at home! The curate saw no light upon the mystery likely to dawn from this quarter, and he was silent and thoughtful. Was it a chance meeting between Martin Chester and Miss Cheyne; and if so, what influence had that man over her to induce her to accompany him in his walks? If it were a meeting arranged between them, why attempt to deceive Lady Cheyne and Mrs. Chester? Once the plain truth suggested itself to him, but he scouted it away as an impossibility. Miss Cheyne was a great friend of Mr. Chester's wife, but she was not Quixotic; she was a woman of no moral courage, and an attempt to bring Mar-

tin Chester to his wife's side again would need more strength of mind, and more argumentative ability, than his betrothed possessed. Besides, he knew the bitterness still at the heart of the husband; and even if Miss Cheyne had thought of testing her powers of persuasion, she would have surely taken Mrs. Chester into her confidence.

He was becoming a trifle more suspicious; and forgetting it was an embarrassing position for Mrs. Chester to receive a visit at that hour from one who had been the means, though the innocent means, of separating her from her husband, he resolved to wait for Miss Cheyne; he firmly believed she would arrive in a few minutes—he had Lady Cheyne's word that it was her daughter's intention to call on Mrs. Chester. He felt the explanation must come from Miss Cheyne herself now, and for that explanation he was anxiously, almost nervously waiting.

Until the solution to the riddle was forthcoming, he did not consider it politic to inform Mrs. Chester that he had seen Miss Cheyne in company with her husband—not that he *would* have a single doubt respecting Miss Cheyne. Crush that, and set his foot upon it at once! But—and the ‘but’ would come in spite of him—what a different person she seemed in the green lanes that night, than he had ever known her! There was expression and animation enough in her face then; and what a cold, unimpassioned face it had always been to him!

Mrs. Chester noted, with no small surprise, the abstracted manner of the curate; and as his silence was becoming embarrassing, and he seemed resolved to allow plenty of time to elapse before he gave up all chance of meeting Miss Cheyne that evening, Mrs. Chester led the conversation, and began to talk of the town, and of St. Jude’s.

Quickly aware of his error, he shook himself away from his perplexities, and spoke of St. Jude's also. Even then, as it will be seen, he veered round to the one subject engrossing his mind.

"The loss of the church has been a great trial to my father and me," he said; "and I hope not alone to ourselves, but to those faithful followers who have supported us in our hour of tribulation. It will be many months before a new church has risen from the ashes which the act of a madman has strewn round us."

"Hark! there is Miss Cheyne."

"I did not hear a knock," said the curate, looking anxiously towards the door.

"I might have been deceived."

The curate resumed his conversation, and Ada for a few moments paid little attention, waiting as she was for the servant-maid to announce the arrival of Miss Cheyne. But the servant entered not, although Ada

fancied she heard the door close softly again, and the maid pass the door and go downstairs. A mistake or an inquiry, she thought ; and the next few earnest words of the curate absorbed her attention, and set her mind upon that plan for Miss Cheyne's happiness which she had been long preparing.

“I have not yet expressed a wish to Lady Cheyne to postpone my marriage with her daughter till the brighter days. Naturally impatient as I may be to see Miss Cheyne my wife, I cannot think of taking her home at a time when everything is unsettled, and before the issue of this trial of Samuel Burles is known. It may be a trial of some length, be postponed, and expose me to much annoyance—for they are setting up a cry in the town that I bear malice against that misguided man who brought St. Jude's to ruin. With the church desolate, my father growing more ill and irritable with every day, with all

the delay and excitement of the prosecution, with actions to contest and actions to defend against Mr. Grimley and his obstinate adherents, I feel I should not be acting justly to Miss Cheyne in asking her to share this trouble with me, and to be unable to give her in return that undivided attention which in the early days of marriage—the honeymoon, as it is called—is justly her due.”

Here was an opportunity, thought Ada, to apprise Mr. Stone of the state of Margaret’s feelings respecting him—every word he uttered was exciting her now, and leading her on to the one great subject.

“You, as a friend of Miss Cheyne’s, can assure me if the postponement of this marriage will be acceptable to Lady Cheyne and her daughter. I have no wish to delay it, save for Miss Cheyne’s sake, of course. If she be content to share my troubles first, I must promise her the honeymoon trip

when the marriage state is older with us."

"I do not think—nay, I am quite sure, Miss Cheyne will have no objection to postpone the marriage."

She had made up her mind now—Ada's impulsive nature was always quick to resolve.

"—And put off the evil day?" said the curate, with that new lightness of manner that sat peculiarly ill upon him.

"Yes, the evil day," murmured Ada.

Mr. Geoffrey Stone looked keenly in the direction of Ada. Something in her tone struck him—as it was intended to strike him—as singular. What did Mrs. Chester mean, and what were her suspicions?

"You speak in a strange—almost a meaning tone, Mrs. Chester, or I am mistaken," said he; "may I ask if you really think the day of my marriage with Miss Cheyne will be an unhappy one for her and me?"

"It is a most unfitting match. I have always thought so."

"May I ask your reason for supposing that?" said the curate.

"It has appeared to me an unfitting match, because you are strangely unfitted for each other," explained Ada; "because, —you will pardon me if I am severe— there is a coldness and a distance between you, very remarkable in a man and woman pledged to unite their fates together; because I do not believe the true confidence, the real undying affection exists now, and existing not before marriage, I am sure that afterwards will ensue nothing but disappointments and regrets." The Reverend Geoffrey Stone had been pale before, but his face was of the ashen colour of the dead now. He felt how true was every word this weak woman uttered; and he thought, incorrectly, as the reader is aware, that she sat there a living proof of all the evil

against which she was warning him. She had traversed the same path then, and married some one to whom her heart was not allied—and there had been trouble, distrust and wrong following the altar vows. This woman's knowledge of the human heart went deep; did she know that his love for Margaret Cheyne was a falsity?—and was it possible that a glance or word of his could have betrayed what he had not confessed to himself until a few days since?

“ May I ask if Miss Cheyne's thoughts are the same as yours, Mrs. Chester—in all confidence I ask it? By your answer depends the future conduct of myself, and I am sure you will honestly and fairly give me a reply.”

“ Honestly and fairly, then, Mr. Stone,” said Ada, with some effort to control her emotion—for she felt the delicate nature of her task, and she desired to soften as

much as possible the shock of the revelation—"Miss Cheyne's engagement to yourself has been a long and severe trial to her. In a weak moment, and pressed by others, she gave her consent to become your future wife, and saw alone the error of her step, and the unhappiness she had prepared for herself and *you* when it was too late for retractation."

"She retracts now?"

"No, she would have been content—having pledged her faith to you—to be bound by her promise; she would have forged a life-long chain for herself, in the hope of making you a faithful wife, and becoming more happy in the future; but when I had wrung from that poor girl the story of her trouble, I felt it was not right or just; and that you, as a minister, as a gentleman, would not seek to bind her to an engagement to which her feelings could not possibly respond."

“What made you think so, Mrs. Chester? Have I proved myself a man so ready to resign my hopes, or give way in my determinations?”

“Last Sunday ‘morning’s sermon assured me that you would not love Miss Cheyne more for keeping faith with you and breaking it with God. You would not have had her live on with that lie at her heart of which you spoke that day, and which, moved by your words, struggled to escape.”

“You are right, Mrs. Chester—you are right!”

The ashen colour had not died away when those words were spoken, or when he sat before her, looking down at his own white, rigidly-clasped hands. Lightning-like thoughts were passing through his brain, for all that motionless attitude, and that dead face. It was a fall for his pride, but there was a strange mixture of joy and disappointment within him

—joy at feeling the chains of his engagement slipping from him, and disappointment to think he had ever fixed his choice on one who had never borne for him one particle of affection. Of late he had distrusted his own heart, but never suspected Margaret Cheyne's. He had lived on with the lie there, too, despite his own sermon, and would have been content to keep it hidden there rather than have broken his word, and proved himself a dishonourable man.

Was it the same moral weakness, which he had considered strength of mind, that had kept him true to the crosses, flowers, and lace veils of St. Jude's, despite the souls they lost to him, and the true friends they turned away? He looked up at last.

"It is all for the best, Mrs. Chester. I thank you heartily for this step, that saves two human beings from much sin and sorrow."

"That you will feel this disappointment acutely at first, I am aware," said Ada;

“but that time will bring its antidote, and that a true heart will be found to gladden many future years, I feel assured.”

“The future is undecipherable—we know not what a day may bring forth,” he answered, gloomily.

He fell into a second fit of meditation—then he suddenly rose, and extended both his hands to Ada, who, after a moment’s hesitation, placed hers within them.

“Yours is a courageous nature, Mrs. Chester,” he said; “for you have done that which even I, with all my firmness, had not the bravery to attempt. You have plucked the false trappings from the dead, and shown the mockery of my worship; you have been the salvation of my life! Stepping forward to save your friend—God knows if she be a friend worthy of you! I will judge human motives no more—you do not know yet that you have also saved one, who, with the same mask over the truth, was blindly following his fate!”

In his vehemence he pressed Ada's hands in his, and she made an effort to withdraw them.

"One moment!" he cried. "I am going away—I may never see you again! Tenchester and St. Jude's will be associated with my name but a little while longer: it will be best for the people, and for me. Let me not go away without a thousand thanks for saving me. The power was alone in your hands, and you have used it nobly! From other lips but yours, from warnings spoken by one less dear to me—yes! forgive me for this one maddening moment, I repeat, less dear to me!—I should have turned away, and kept wise in my own conceit. I have awakened now, and I thank you for the gentle words which have roused me from my stupor!"

"Pray, leave me, sir—I beg of you to leave me!" implored the alarmed Ada.

He released her hands at that entreaty,

and with a long, sad, sorrowing gaze, he moved towards the door.

“You are right, madam ; I am not acting well, and I am a weak, passionate child. A word might save me from evil, and a word or look might destroy the whole earnest practice of a life, and show me as weak and erring as my fellows. If, in the sinful excitement of the last few moments I have pained you, or alarmed you—rewarding you for much of kindness by ingratitude, pray forgive me. I am striving to act right, and struggling against wrong with all my soul!—and,” with a radiant look upon his face that changed its whole expression and lighted it as with something divine, “my soul will not be lost from weakness. By God’s help, I will return it to His hands unmarred by the baser passions of humanity. He will help me, and, dear madam, He will reward you in good time—if not on earth, in heaven !”

He passed from the room, and in a moment

afterwards the street-door closed behind him. Ada dropped into her chair again and began to cry piteously. She saw it all now; the terrible confession she had escaped from—the secret of Geoffrey Stone's life was glowing there before her. His agitations, his burning glances, the few words he had let drop from his fevered lips, told of the love he had kept hidden in his heart for her, Martin Chester's wife!

Yes, Martin Chester's wife in thought and deed still, with the love that was despised still undivided, and with her true heart yearning fondly for the lost. Heaven be thanked for the good and honest women in the world still—for those tried in the furnace of affliction and still strong! Men of that world, men who write books and are sceptical, preach to us of woman's weakness, and hold up too often the highly-coloured picture of the woman losing hold of right and sinking honour, faith and godliness, as if there were no purer, better

moral to be taught by showing the power to resist and the strength to walk uprightly.

Ada was still weeping when the servant tapped at the door, and opened it. She was not ashamed of her tears, although her first womanly instinct was to conceal them.

“What is it, Mary?”

“Oh, if you please, ma’am, whilst you and Mr. Stone were talking, ma’am—Mr. Chester called.”

“Mr. Chester?” exclaimed Ada, rising with her hands pressed to her heaving bosom—“not Mr. Martin Chester!”

“Yes, ma’am, our master—Mr. Martin.”

“And where is he?—why has he gone away?”

“He asked, ma’am, if you were alone; and when he heard Mr. Stone was here, ma’am, he turned as white as a table-kiver, and asked which Mr. Stone—and then, ma’am, he went away again.”

“And you did not tell me—oh, you did not

tell me he was here!" cried Mrs. Chester, wringing her hands.

"He said I wasn't to disturb you on any account, and that no doubt Mr. Stone's business was more important than his own. I asked him, ma'am, when he would call again, and oh! my, ma'am——"

"Well—well?"

"And he said '*Never*,' ma'am—so awfully, it sunk into me like a lump of lead. Oh! I am so sorry!" And the maid-servant, who had known more of Mrs. Chester's trials and troubles—thanks to surreptitious snatches at door-cracks and key-holes—and felt more for them than Mrs. Chester was aware, began to cry, and to hide her eyes with her apron.

"Hush, hush, go away now. I want to be alone. You distress me, Mary."

Mary went away at her mistress's request, and took her tears to the cook, and watered that stout lady's bountiful bosom with

them. Presently there was a fall overhead, and, scenting danger, housemaid and cook scuttled hurriedly upstairs, and pushed open the room-door together.

Ada Chester was lying on the floor in a fainting-fit. She had clutched at the desk to save herself from falling, and only brought it down with her, where it lay a foot from her side, with all the old love-letters strewn about her like dead leaves !

CHAPTER IV.

RECOVERY AND RELAPSE.

It is necessary, for the better understanding of this story, that we put back the hands of the clock an hour or two, and return to Martin and Miss Cheyne, walking slowly along the country road.

Miss Cheyne had broken the ice that had closed in and frozen round this man's better nature, and with all a woman's fervour she resumed the conversation which the sudden appearance of Geoffrey Stone had interrupted. And that sudden appearance of the curate on the scene had brought its accu-

sation to Martin, despite the gloomy frown with which he passed him. He remembered meeting Mr. Stone in circumstances no more suspicious, and of waiting for no explanation. Miss Cheyne continued her narration, and Martin listened now with eager attention. He understood, for the first time, the true disposition of his wife—all her love and generous impulse, and all that pride and angry spirit which resented the least suspicion, and had done so much to mar her life. It seemed all plain now, and he had been a coward and a tyrant. When he had heard the whole story, almost in the very words that Ada had communicated it to Margaret Cheyne, he felt what a life-long trouble he had been forging for himself, and how his strength to act justly and think right had been weaker than the young girl's at his side. He felt, too, the rush of tumultuous joy to his heart, and he had never expected one gleam of consolation there again!

“Miss Cheyne, you are one of the few good people left in this world,” said Martin; “you do not leave the stones unturned and the barriers in the way to rescue the erring and the desperate. You set aside the stately forms of ceremony, and, with your whole soul in the cause before you, strike boldly at the gigantic evil, and bring it to the ground. You have ventured out of your sphere to reclaim me, and if the success of your effort is its real reward—and I am sure it is—why, you have it, Miss Cheyne, for I am saved from myself.”

“And Ada is saved too, and you will make her life happy again?”

“I will attempt it—poor Ada!”

“You will find her love as strong as ever, and as anxious to take its rightful share of blame. Knowing her character better than on the day you parted from her, you will see that where an angry word or an unjust suspicion will wrap her in her pride, and

rouse her spirit to resist, that a word spoken in kindness and indicative of trust, will bring her to your arms at once."

"Miss Cheyne may confide in my powers of self-command now," said Martin, with a brighter smile than his face had shown for many a day, "notwithstanding that I am grateful for her teaching."

"Mr. Chester will forgive my schooling," responded Margaret; "but remembering his old impetuosity and his former sternness, I could not think a warning out of place."

"God bless you for a true-hearted woman," exclaimed Martin; "no words of yours are out of place with me; they will be always dear and precious. I shall remember them as words of my guardian angel, who plucked me from the darkness of my evil spirit, and showed the light and life awaiting me. Miss Cheyne, I am going to her at once."

"Still the old impetuosity!"

“Without the sternness that drove me on the rocks,” cried Martin. “I will go to her now.”

“Will you let me see her first? Will you let me prepare her for the shock of meeting you?—she is not strong or well.”

“No, no, Miss Cheyne—you must leave me the task of preparing and solacing her: I will not alarm her by a word. Return to Haselton House, Miss Cheyne, satisfied that you have saved me from a life of misery, and brought back Ada’s happiness. That is,” he added, after a pause, “if I can make her happy now, and if the shadow of that cruel parting lies not always on her heart.”

“It will be chased away by the brightness of the new re-union, please God!”

“Please God!” repeated Martin, as he bade her a hasty good night, and hurried away. Miss Cheyne looked after him, and trusted the impetuous spirit of which she had warned him would not carry him past

the goal, and land him on the other side. She could not think so for a moment, now—he was so determined to forgive and forget the past, and live anew in the future. ‘Perhaps, after all, he was right,’ she thought: ‘it would be better to surprise her with his love. Ada was impulsive, too, and most generous in those moments of impulse. She would return to Haselton House, and pray for a happy meeting between the husband and wife.’

Meanwhile, Martin strode on, full of impatience. The dusk of evening had stolen over the scene, and the stars were brightening above him like his hopes. The summer air was whispering of love, and faith renewed, and his heart was thrilling as he walked. Walked—he could walk no longer—he must run! The high-road, too, was circuitous, and he knew a short-cut through Haselton Park. There was no right of way; but there was only Lady Cheyne, or her daughter, to pro-

secute, and he thought either would excuse his intrusion under the circumstances. Certainly, he might be shot for a poacher by a watchful gamekeeper ; but then, gamekeepers never were watchful, and never caught a poacher in their lives. So he leaped the palings, and dived into a green dell, and went winding in and out the great old chestnut trees, his heart still beating joyfully.

Now, there is an old proverb, more apposite than the generality of proverbs, that where there is most haste, there is worse speed ; and the truth of this homely adage was quickly apparent to Martin Chester. He did *not* know a short-cut through Haselton Park, or, in his excitement, he had forgotten to look closely for the landmarks. For a few minutes he ran on, satisfied with his speed and his powers of memory—and then he began to slacken the one, and doubt the other. The trees seemed strange to him, or the shades of evening had changed their appear-

ance. In the twilight, they were certainly too close together, or he was making for the wildest and thickest part of the park. He turned and looked back ; he had long since lost sight of the park palings that skirted the road, and indeed he was doubtful, after a moment, in which direction they lay. He had better proceed, keeping a little to the left, where the grass ran not so wild, and was not so shadowed with trees. But keeping to the left only brought him more trees, and ferns, and brushwood, from which the deer plunged suddenly here and there, and made him leap a little. He had to come to a full stop again, and seriously deliberate. He had certainly lost his way—the night was coming on, and Haselton Park was of no small extent.

He was vexed at his folly now, and he stamped once or twice with impatience at the precipitation that had placed him in so awkward a predicament. He listened for sounds of life to guide him — carriages or

market-carts on the high-road, or the clock-bell from Lady Cheyne's stables, or the barking from the kennels where the hounds were kept. He must have got very deep into the park, for all was unnaturally still. There was hardly light enough to see the time by his watch—he could just make out three minutes to nine, by dint of straining his eyes to the utmost. He would set his back against a tree and wait till nine o'clock; the stable-bell, or some church-clock in the vicinity—unless it were the burnt and blackened one of St. Jude's—would afford him knowledge of his whereabouts. Nine o'clock at last, and no church-clock striking—he was decidedly lost in Haselton Park. It was the first time he had been lost in his life, too, and that made him the more angry. Once he fancied he heard a clock striking very faintly and far away, but he would not venture in a vague direction, on the strength of what might have

been a singing in his ears. He would make an effort to retrace his steps now; he turned quickly and then stopped again, for there was a peculiar rustling in a clump of furze immediately in advance, as though some one who had been watching him had suddenly dipped behind it.

Was it another deer startled out of its first sleep, or was it imagination altogether? Perhaps, and he smiled at the thought, he was going to be arrested for a poacher after all. Half-a-dozen quick steps took him to the furze-bushes, from which he sprung back suddenly and stood upon the defensive, as a tall man leaped up from the midst.

“Unearthed, Martin Chester!” said the man.

“Sam Burles!” exclaimed Martin, recognizing him more by the voice than by the face almost lost in the shadow, or by the clothes hanging in rags upon him.

‘Ay, you didn’t expect to find such

choice company in Haselton Park, Martin Chest'r."

"What are you doing here?"

"Waiting till its a bit darker to be off Lunnonwards. Doan't you think," with a short laugh, "that I ha' had enough of Tenchester?"

"You have escaped from the gaol."

"To be sure. It was an old tinder-box, and affairs were looking black loike. There wor an examination for a feller to-morrow, and it would ha' been all up arter that. Once let the parson ha' had his say, and lagged for life it ha' been at least. That parson's been a devil to me!"

"That will do, Sam," said Martin; "I wish I could have met you in a more repentant spirit, I should not then have felt such an itching desire to take side with the law and re-arrest you."

"Me!" said Sam, in a peculiar tone; "no, I doan't think you'd do that for

ould acquaintance sake, or for mercy's sake, —and I doan't think you'd do it for your loife's sake."

And from the ragged bosom of his shirt Iron Sam produced a pistol.

"The gamekeepers be very careless to go out and leave these playthings aboot," said Sam, satirically; "though its an ill wind that blows nobody good. Well, its dark now—I'll wish you a good night, sir."

He moved a step or two from his position, and then returned to Martin's side and put his hand upon his arm. Martin was on his guard, and prepared to grapple with him at the first sign of danger.

"I doan't think it wor in your heart, man, to try to stop me—I woan't think so bad on you as that, though you ha' turned a good deal agin me, loike the rest. I ha' doon no harm—mayhaps I doon good by burning the oold church—and I ha' paid

the parson out. If I ha' met him here to-night as I ha' you, it would been a settling of scores for all toime!"

"Still revengeful?"

"'Cause I can't get a fair hit at him—he's so quick on a mon. It's give and take, and no breathing-time. I burnt his church down, and he nearly nabbed me doing it. And I might ha' shot him that night at the window if I'd loiked, and cleared off all accounts. There's the effects of being marciful."

Martin did not see where, but he was not anxious for argument.

"I arn't all iron, you see," said Sam; "I should be sorry to do anything very bad, unless I wor hard-up for a chance of loife—and I may be hard-up soon! *You* won't peach on me, I know, for all your saying so. You're a pretty good sort, and ha' been a friend to me, whatever you may be now. You ha' done me and my father mony a good turn, and I'm not ungrateful for it. P'raps, sir," he said,

with a wistful look at Martin, "you woan't mind thinking of the old man now and then, when I'm out of England—he ha' been a better fayther than I ha' been a son, and I know he'll miss me, and go mad or bad. I doan't know as I ever thought loike this on him before—but you woan't forget him, sir?"

"No."

"That's koind."

He extended his hand, then drew it hastily back again.

"Noa—noa—not now!"

He walked away, then stopped again, and pointed to the right.

"Keep straight on, Martin Chester, till you coom to a stone wall, and then follow the footpath to the roight—it will lead you to the high road."

Martin Chester and Sam Burles went their separate ways, Martin doubtful in his mind if he had acted fairly to his country's laws in not attempting the recapture of his late com-

panion. Yet he could not feel his conscience accuse him ; had he been successful in securing Burles, which was doubtful, the man's blood would have been on his head. Let him go on his way in his dark ignorance, and may the knowledge of what he has escaped from make a better man of him. Martin Chester was inclined to be merciful that night, and he was full of charitable thoughts, as he reached the remains of a stone wall, and struck into a footpath just discernible in the darkness. The high road at last, and, fortunately for him, only three hundred yards from that house which Frank had once christened "Turtle Dove Villa" in the lightness of his heart. And the light thoughts would return to all of them now, and his strange story have a happy ending !

Before the house at last, and with a faltering step advancing up the garden path. There was a bright light in the drawing-room, where he had hurled forth his denunciations, and had

stood firm against his love and his own feelings—and where he had turned his picture to the wall!

A few more minutes, and, with God's help, he should have made atonement for the past. His trembling hand seized the knocker of the door, and announced his late arrival. Only a minute more,—and then!

The door opened, and the maid, whom he recognized as an old servant, stood before him, looking very much scared at his sudden appearance.

“Mr.—Mr. Chester!” she exclaimed.

“Hush—not so loud! Where is your mistress?”

“In the drawing-room, sir,” replied the girl—“with Mr. Stone.”

“Which Mr. Stone, girl?” he cried, with all his old cruel suspicions coming back with a rush to his brain.

“Mr. Geoffrey Stone.”

He set his teeth and glared wildly at the

girl. He made one step towards the room, then stopped ; and, after muttering that Mr. Stone was not to be disturbed on his account, turned away and went slowly down the steps.

“When shall I tell mistress you will return, sir?” called the maid after him.

He answered, “Never,” without looking back, and continued his way, and went along the garden path to the high road ; then with one hand in his breast, and his head bowed abjectly, he bore away his disappointment with seven evil spirits worse than the first preying on his soul.

He had been right after all, and Miss Cheyne was wrong ! What should a girl like her, with so little experience of life, know of the dark world ? He had been a madman to believe in her.

Grant now that his first great step had been taken in the wrong direction, that he had been too hard and unyielding, and shown

too little appreciation of his wife's true nature, what excuse was there for that wife now? She knew his objections to Mr. Stone, nay, his decided dislike to him; she had heard him place that man under ban and interdict, and yet he visited her at all hours of the day and night. Was he not more of his evil genius than Sam Burles's?—had he not been a curse to the parish and to his fellow-men since his hateful presence had shadowed Tenchester?

What did he want at his house at that hour? How dare Ada Chester—*his* wife still—receive such a man? He turned back with an oath, and took up his position under the clump of trees across the road, from which he had watched the house some weeks before. He had had enough of Mr. Stone; that gentleman had had his own way too long, and it was time to balk him. If he so forgot his cloth as to follow up men's wives, and take advantage of their husband's absence to prose-

cute his suit, there was no respect for his cloth to be shown by Martin Chester. They would be man to man now, and the curate should not escape him without a struggle. He would wait there till Geoffrey Stone came forth, and then let him defend his cause if he dared.

Under the dark trees, and scarcely breathing to himself, waited Martin Chester to revenge his wrongs.

CHAPTER V.

THE MEETING.

THE sky grew darker with Martin Chester's darker thoughts. The stars became more full of holy fire as they shone down on him whose evil passions burned more fiercely every moment. Nursing his wrongs, and brooding over the injuries which, day by day and week by week, had made him the wretched man he was, he kept his ground beneath the shadow of the trees, and watched the lighted window-blind. What a long while they were together!—what could they have to say in all those slow, dragging moments

which the muttered curses from his lips could not precipitate?

Half-an-hour since he had begun his watch there, and yet no coming forth of Geoffrey Stone. Some late workmen from the mines had passed and looked curiously at him; one of the mounted patrol had ridden by in great haste, and with his cutlass clanging against his horse's sides; and a junior clerk from his own office had nearly swallowed his cigar by coming suddenly upon him under the trees. But they passed on and left him watching under the black sky and the bright stars.

'Would Geoffrey Stone never come forth?' he thought, with a quick stamp of his heel; the night was growing very late, 'Ha! may the curse of God fall like lightning on them both—look there!'

They were standing with their hands clasped; he could see their shadows on the blind as he stood with his fists clenched, and his chest heaving.

Curse them both for deceiving him and blighting his whole life! God be thanked for rescuing him from becoming the dupe of a false woman at the eleventh hour! He dashed himself back against the trees and brought some leaves—that had withered early like his heart—showering down upon him. Would he be long now?—if Stone were long now—he should go raving mad!

No, not long. An age to him, perhaps, but a few short moments to men whose lives were not computed by minutes of agonizing horror. Geoffrey Stone came forth at last, and Martin saw he tottered at first like an old man, and stopped once with his hand to his side. Then he came on again with a step more firm, and the click of the gate-latch at last assured the watcher that his rival was a few yards in advance of him.

Martin Chester, from his wild beast lair, let the curate proceed some distance in advance, before he stepped into the road

and followed him. It did not strike him as peculiar that the curate had turned away from Tenchester; it seemed only better for his own retributive purpose.

Geoffrey Stone had not taken this route unconsciously; he was excited, and his brain was troubled; he felt he could not return to the parsonage yet, and to his stifling room looking on the ruins of St. Jude's. He yearned for fresh air, and a free lonely place to think of all that had happened in the eventful day dying out, and all that lay before him in the time to come.

"We meet again, Geoffrey Stone, curate of St. Jude's!" was muttered, with an intensity of hate that roused the young minister from his reverie.

He expected to find Martin Chester at his side, but not with that strange look and with those fiery eyes.

"Yes—we meet again," responded the curate; "I am glad to see you."

"Considering how pleasant have been our meetings, and what a deal of satisfaction they have brought to you and me, the remark is worthy of so false a man."

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Chester," said Geoffrey, taking no heed of the suppressed rage of his companion; "for I am glad to seize every opportunity of doing good that may be left me, yet a little while. I am anxious to show to the best of my ability that error of your ways which has desolated the home, and made havoc with the happiness of a pure-minded woman."

"You are a liar, sir!"

Geoffrey Stone turned his dark eyes upon his companion, and looked proudly back the slander. Even Martin for a moment thought he might be mistaken, till the recollections of the past mastered him once more.

"You are a liar! It is your deep accursed craft that has made every action

of your life a lie, and that has desolated *my* home and happiness, not that of my wife and your accomplice! I have been willing to believe in her and you, and to-night from the lips of an innocent girl I have listened to a wild story that has nearly cast me like a love-sick madman at a wanton's feet."

"Miss Cheyne then has——?"

"Miss Cheyne has been deceived herself, sir," thundered Martin; "Miss Cheyne and I are equally your dupes. *Were* equally your dupes, sir, till to-night; for this night unmasks you: and were your profession ten thousand times more holy, I would strike!"

He raised his clenched hand quickly, but Geoffrey Stone caught him by the wrist. "You are mad and blind, sir—beware of what you do. I am only a man like yourself, and have much to trouble me."

A young woman, in a torn plaid shawl, met them at this moment, and stood in the roadway and looked after them till they had passed from her sight. She had heard the high words between them, and seen Martin Chester's threatening gesture, and she went on at last wondering what it was all about—till thoughts of a lover of hers, known as Samuel Burles, drove other people's affairs from her mind.

Meanwhile the merchant and the minister went along the dark road, the minister on guard against any attack of Martin.

"If you raise a hand against me, Martin Chester, I may forget myself, and strike back—a little to-night may make me like yourself, and a little forbearance in us both may make us better men."

"What did you want with my wife, sir?—what right had you to seek her out, knowing her husband was not there to preserve her from harm?"

“Patience—let me think.”

There was something sad and appealing in the tone, and Martin's hand unclenched. The curate walked silently on. He was a wilful man, and it had always been a struggle to conquer his will. He had never been inclined to give way to threats, and the threat of a blow was to harden him, and to shut up his heart hermetically. Yet he had sought Martin once, and though his good intentions had been thrust upon himself, his pride had not been deeply aroused. And on that night he was so strangely different; he could not look on human misery, in any shape or form, and not feel willing to alleviate it; his mind was unsettled, and, as he had said a moment since, there was much to trouble him. He would be at peace with all the world that night—especially with that man at his side, whom he had injured for a moment in his thoughts,

and whose life he had even helped to blight. He had a right to be humiliated, for he had sinned against God and man. The wife of Martin Chester had taught him his duty, and that woman—the only one he had ever loved—was unhappy by his act! Yes, he would tell him all—even of his last struggle, and his parting words to Ada Chester.

“Mr. Chester,” said he, at last, “we have but a little while on earth to teach peace and good-will amongst men, and both of us have failed in the practice of so good a lesson. I will tell you why I sought your wife, and I think I will prove, even to you, that no better, truer woman lives. I only ask your patience—when you feel in your heart I lie, strike.”

Geoffrey Stone told his story simply. He did not allude a great deal to the past, or to the light thrown upon it by Margaret Cheyne; he spoke chiefly

of the incidents of that night, of his own doubts of the motives that had brought Martin and Miss Cheyne together, of his visit to Haselton House, and Mrs. Chester. What he thought never to tell to living man, and that which Mrs. Chester had related to him, he briefly recapitulated, and not without emotion, to Martin; and he concluded by the painful, humiliating confession of his unworthiness and weakness—of that one moment, when right and wrong were hopelessly confounded, and the secret of his life leaped to his lips, and betrayed him.

“It was a moment of passion—weak, erring, objectless. And in my madness I respected her as a saint far above me, and did not wrong her by one word. I knew her soul was pure, and there had never been a thought traitorous to her love and you, and I loved her at that moment more for that. And until that

moment, Martin Chester, your wife has never heard a word from me that I might blush at, or that the world might not listen to. Do you believe me?"

"Yes."

Geoffrey Stone extended his hand, but Martin, with his gaze directed earthward, did not see it. He might not have cared to take it in his own if he had; for he had never liked the man, and a few moments outpouring of his heart was not to sweep away in an instant the prejudice and hate that he had borne towards him. He believed every word that he had heard, and he felt himself unworthy—felt, too, the danger from which he had escaped, and was impressed more than he cared to own by the frank avowal of the curate. He was anxious to get home, and think of it all in the solitude of his own chamber, before the day dawned for a better life. Yes, from that day, a better life! What he had turned from only an hour since,

and killed with fresh disappointments and new suspicions, he would begin again on the morrow, and carry out hopefully and manfully.

"I may be better able to thank you at a future day for all that you have said to-night, Mr. Stone," said he. "I can only ask now, —forbearance."

"It is yours. You and I have both been weak and erring men, despite our wills of iron, which, in our narrow pride, were not to be subdued. Good night."

"Good night. You do not return to Tenchester?"

"Not directly."

The young men parted, and Martin hastened away down the road, past the trees under which he had watched and borne such malice—past the house, looking so still and lifeless at that hour, and wherein his neglected wife was slowly recovering from her stupor in the bedroom where the feeble night-lamp flickered. He stopped to breathe one prayer

for Ada, the first that had escaped his lips for many a day, and then went on again—to stop again, and listen to the echoes woke up that night by the sharp report of fire-arms.

“Poachers in Haselton Park,” he thought, as he continued his way to Tenchester, too full of his own thoughts to remember Sam Burles’ pistol, the place in which he had seen Burles last, and the road Mr. Geoffrey Stone had taken.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ARREST.

MARTIN CHESTER turned the key of his room in the great warehouses in High Street, and walked into his bachelor quarters with a sense of lightness he had never experienced there before. It had been a wild night, with hope, and despair, and hope again, to excite him; and, as he dropped into an arm-chair by his bedside, he was conscious of his limbs trembling, and of the steadiness of his right hand being more than doubtful. Still, he felt very light about the heart, although his head ached, and his eyes more resembled fire-

balls than anything else he could compare them to.

Martin did not feel inclined to rest: sleep, in his present excited state, he knew would be denied him. He preferred reclining indolently in his chair, with his thoughts resolving themselves into something like order, after a stout battle to obtain the mastery, and throw all in confusion.

Yes, he thought the evil days were over now, and the new era would begin to-morrow. Early to-morrow he would be at Ada's side, to forget, forgive, and ask forgiveness. How mad and wicked he had been all those latter days of his grief, and how blind to what a child might see! He had never placed faith in the doctrine of mutual concessions, although he saw now that without charity, without the desire to meet half-way the penitent, and be met half-way one's self, love would be weak, and happiness for ever in vain.

Ah! let him take down the great book of his fate, and turn over a new leaf—away with the blurred, and torn, and blackened sheets that record so much to shame him, and on this fair white page let him write his life anew. And yet the disfigured leaves appertaining to the past should not be forgotten—no, let them remain in the volume to teach many a lesson of forbearance, and by experience warn him of the dangers to be shunned.

He was very happy—even inclined to be content with his headache and his amateur palsy. He wished Frank were in the warehouse, or any human being that he loved or might confide in. He hoped Frank would come early that he might tell him all, and receive his congratulations before he started in search of his wife's love. How pleased Frank would be. God bless that simple, honest brother of his—he was always pleased when good fortune fell to

anybody's share, or friends who had quarrelled were reconciled, or lovers' little differences were settled. And Frank would be happy now, for the curate of Tenchester had made a clean breast of it, and was not going to marry Miss Cheyne. Miss Cheyne and Ada would be sisters then in earnest—what a bright little world it would be, to be sure! Frank's villa should be built next his own, and his wife could always be dropping in to see Ada and him; and then Frank's children, in good time, would be running about the lawn with *her* children—he could get no further than that in the future; he broke down and covered his face with his hands.

A few tears relieved him, and made his headache less. Shortly he was on his feet, bustling about the room by the light of his night-lamp, and packing his things in his portmanteau ready for *home*!

That packing process was not a hurried

one; he liked to stop every minute or two and think of the future, as he had drawn it "in his mind's eye," and as we have attempted to picture it; and to revel in the gladness therein was to make him feel happy, and curtail the dark hours before morning.

The nights were not long then, and the gray dawn began to shimmer through the curtain and shame the lamp for having made a night of it, before Martin had completed his arrangements and put the key of the portmanteau in his pocket. Yes, the day had come—a day to be marked with a white stone, he felt assured of that! He extinguished the lamp, and drew the blind up a few inches to look into the street. A quiet street at that hour, and the quiet sky above it loaded with clouds that seemed to threaten rain. It should have been a sunny day for once—but there was sunshine within him now, and he need

fear no more. Under a leaden sky, or a blue one, his heart would feel as full and beat as warmly.

He felt more calm in the gray daylight; he might be able to snatch half an hour's repose in the easy chair now, and yet he scarcely cared to sleep. Might he not wake up to find it all a dream, and only his old misery, reality? He had turned towards the chair, and though the folly of the last thought produced a smile, it made him pause.

Pausing and smiling thus at his superstitious fears, when a heavy knocking on the office-doors startled him, and turned him pale. A heavy impetuous knocking at that early hour was something new to Tenchester, and to the firm of Chester, Grimley and Chester a something that had never occurred before in its experience.

Quick to imagine harm, as he had been ready to believe, during the last hour, in

every conceivable bliss, he opened his room-door, and ran hastily downstairs. He felt something strange and awful had happened, or he would not have been sent for at an hour so early. Frank or Ada was ill, and misfortune was to dog his footsteps to his death-bed ! There was no shaking it off ; come one hope, and its damning antithesis followed as its shadow ; from the light evolved darkness, and from every blessing that fell upon him came the curse to despoil. He felt it was unbarring the door to let in his death-warrant, as his hands removed the heavy fastenings one by one. The door open at last, and two men standing before him—one, the inspector of the county police, a man he knew well, and whom he was accustomed to exchange “good days” with. The Tenchester bank, or his own firm, had been robbed, and his spirits went up several degrees !

“Well, Roberts—any bad news for us ?”

“I’m afraid so, Mr. Chester.”

“What is it?”

“Mr. Geoffrey Stone, the curate, has been found murdered on the Tenchester road.”

“Good God!”

Martin’s hands dropped to his side, and the face which had been pale before with doubt *ashened* over in a death-like manner. Geoffrey Stone murdered on the high road, and he had parted with him but a few minutes before—had, thank heaven, made his peace with him! Then there rose before him the figure of Sam Burles, as he had seen him last; and there rang again in his ears the report of a gun or pistol that he had heard late last night. He turned quickly to the inspector.

“Shot?”

“Yes,” said the inspector—“*shot*.”

Martin saw the inspector and his companion exchange glances, and for the first time a suspicion, that he might find it difficult to explain where he had seen the curate last, fell upon his mind. That suspicion was quickly

followed by another, more dark and awful than the last—he might be even suspected of the deed!

“It’s a bad job, Mr. Chester,” said Roberts; “and it’s a hard task for me, knowing you so long and well, to have to say it’s my duty to make you my prisoner.”

“You have a warrant for my apprehension?”

“Yes.”

“On the suspicion that I have murdered Mr. Stone?”

“That’s it, sir, unfortunately,” said Roberts.

“There is little doubt that that suspicion will soon be dispelled,” said Martin. “I think my own life and character might have shielded me from it, at a stage so early.”

“I hope—ay, and I believe it’s all a mistake sir; but duty is duty.”

“I would not have you neglect it for my sake, Mr. Roberts.”

“You will consider yourself my prisoner?”

“Yes.”

“Do you mind stepping upstairs again with me, Mr. Chester?”

“Not in the least.”

Roberts went upstairs, followed by Martin, the stranger bringing up the rear. It was neatly and delicately managed; but Martin felt those men would no more have allowed him to precede or proceed them, than they would have let him mind the street door till their return. They were watchful of his every movement: when he crossed to the window, the comrade of Roberts stood ready to intercept a leap towards it; and had he moved another step towards the razor on his dressing-glass they would have sprung upon him. It was all very like a dream: he could scarcely believe that he was standing there, arrested for taking away a fellow-creature's life, and that the officers were searching for further proof to bring the crime home to him! It was like a dream; for another constable

rose up as if by magic, and was keeping guard at the door when Martin looked round again. Roberts searched diligently every corner of the room, and then turned to the portmanteau, and asked Martin for the key.

Martin gave him the key, and asked him what he expected to find.

"I expect to find nothing, sir; but, as I said before, duty's duty."

Mr. Roberts' companion here observed, or soliloquized—

"All things packed up to go away—hum!"

"Ah! that's bad," ejaculated Roberts; "I'm very sorry, Mr. Chester, to say so—but that's bad."

"I ——" began Martin, when Roberts hastily interrupted him.

"You'd better not talk, sir. I wouldn't talk, if I was you; it's against the rules, and it'll always go against you—you're not bound to convict yourself."

"I am bound to declare my innocence—to

protest against the absurdity of this charge," said Martin, warmly.

"Just as you like, sir ; but I wouldn't speak if I was you."

Second thoughts assured Martin that the inspector was right. The remembrance of trials that he had read convinced him that the first words, even of an innocent man, spoken in the heat of passion, and under the first excitement of arrest, often bear witness against him. One word that he had already uttered in the suddenness of his surprise he knew would rise up, and take fearful proportions if there were further evidence of circumstance to weave a coil around him—that one word "*Shot*" which he had uttered, as the conviction of the manner by which Mr. Stone had met his death, impressed itself upon him.

However, there was no help for it at present but prison. He had faith to believe there was nothing against him, and the consciousness of his own innocence strengthened

him, and gave him courage. He did not, for a moment, feel despair, and he only postponed for a few days all the happiness that he thought would begin with the dawn. It was an unpleasant business, but law had been too suspicious and prematurely alert. His own good name, his own past character, ought to have preserved him from the charge, but he must put up with it now. So Martin Chester was taken away hopefully to prison.

Meanwhile, from the irregular grass border that skirted the roads, from the grass-grown path facing the private wicket opening on the back of the great park of Lady Cheyne's, they had taken up him who had been shot down yesternight. From his life's blood on the grass under the roadway they had borne him along under the stars,—for he had been found before the daybreak,—and passed with their sad burden into Tenchester, and opened the gate of the parsonage, and gone slowly up the garden path.

They laid him in the room that he had quitted only a few hours since, and left him with a more peaceful expression on his marble face than he had ever shown in the pulpit of St. Jude's.

And there came to look upon that marble face, and touch the marble forehead with his lips, a tottering old man, borne up by his groom and footman, who had to turn their heads aside, and be like children in their grief. A tottering old man, on whom the hand of affliction had fallen too suddenly and heavily ever to bring back strength of mind or body. A man standing unloved in the world, who had lived alone for his son, and had made an idol of him.

And now the hand of the Destroyer had dashed the idol to the ground, and the father was mourning in the desolateness of his heart over all that he had loved, and every hope that he had lived for!

Darken the room, and leave that old man

sobbing by his dead son's side—there is no comfort on earth in the first moments of a father's loss.

CHAPTER VII.

COMMITTED FOR TRIAL.

ANOTHER subject for Tenchester townsfolk. High Church and incendiarism at St. Jude's were all set aside now for the one topic of the murder, and the latest evidence that had come home to the murderer. People appeared to have but one opinion on the subject, and only a very few out of the number who had known Martin Chester all their lives believed him guiltless of the deed. There were many to pity Martin, many to assert that Geoffrey Stone had courted his fate by unceasing opposition, by meddling

with other men's affairs, and confessing other men's wives—but few to own a belief that the hand of Martin was unstained by his blood.

The chain of evidence was strong, and when link by link came to be added, Martin himself was staggered by the array of facts which all seemed to point to his part in the one appalling deed. Witnesses rose up to confront him, and still further implicate him at the inquest, at the examinations—and there was nothing save his own word to shake the public conviction. The maid-servant at his villa, who had opened the door to him on the night of the murder, was there to depose to his agitation, to his inquiries concerning the late visitor to his wife—some workmen from the mines had seen some one like him half-an-hour afterwards hiding beneath the trees across the road, and one of his junior clerks had run against him there at a time more late, and

could swear to him. Lastly, there rose up a formidable witness who, despite her agitation, her nervousness, her errors under cross-examination, appeared to seal the fate of Martin Chester. She swore to seeing Martin Chester and Geoffrey Stone together, and to hearing high words between them as they passed her, and to the raising of the hand of Martin against the curate, and the curate catching Martin by the wrist. She had not heard a pistol shot—she cried bitterly here—but she had not heard a pistol shot as she hoped to see heaven; and she did not know what made her cry, till some one mentioned the name of Samuel Burles, and then it transpired that she had been Samuel Burles' mistress, and knew more than she cared to tell about that young gentleman's escape from Tenchester gaol. She was not there to be talked to about Samuel Burles—let people mind their own business; if any one wanted to shift the crime on his shoulders,

because he had escaped from prison that night, they wouldn't have her to help. On her oath had she seen or heard of Samuel Burles that night? On her oath she had heard of him—he had gone away to London in a cart under some sheep-skins, and she had taken some things to the driver for Burles half-an-hour before she had met Mr. Chester and Mr. Stone. But the man who had driven the horse and cart was not forthcoming, and one or two people were inclined to believe Samuel Burles had had his full revenge at last. But then the visit of Martin to his wife's house, his feigned departure down the road, his return and that guilty concealment among the trees, looked so bad; and, however much the last witness under cross-examination might confess, there was no shaking the statement that she had seen the murdered man in company with the prisoner a quarter-of-an-hour before the shot was fired. Finally, as Martin had feared,



PART THE LAST.



CHAPTER I.

SUSPICIONS.

THROUGH evil report and good report Frank Chester kept to his brother's side, and believed in his innocence. Whatever the world might say, or people suspect—however stern Martin had been, however inveterate or jealous—he knew him too well, to believe that the curse of Cain was on him. Martin had told him every word of the story, and Frank knew not a word had been altered. Martin's nature had always been a truthful one; as a boy at school he had scorned to lie to evade his punishment when lying well

would have saved him ; and even now, when a softer word, a different phrase might have placed his conduct, even without a falsehood, in a fairer light, he chose the plain truth and the hard word in preference.

Frank was allowed to see his brother every day ; and without Frank's cheering speeches, and bright presence, Martin's health and spirits would have completely broken down. Since the examination and his committal for trial, Martin in his heart had begun to despond ; there was so much to be said against him, and so little that he could disprove, or bring forward in defence. His own story, which could not be circumstantiated, would be treated as his last despairing clutch at life ; and his meeting with Sam Burles and the incident of the pistol, set down as a malicious attempt to cast the guilt upon another's head. Then there was bad news of his wife—the knowledge that she was dangerously ill at home — the

doubt that she herself might believe Geoffrey Stone had fallen by his hand, and the possibility of the sad details of the quarrel that had parted them being laid before the world.

There was some satisfaction, too, in knowing the whole world was not against him—that Mr. Grimley and Miss Cheyne, each of whom had been allowed to visit him, believed his story, and thought with Frank that the guilty man was still at large.

Time went on—the Assizes were about to open, and the trial for wilful murder of Martin Chester to commence. Mrs. Chester still remained weak and ill, and all mention of the trial was strictly forbidden by her physicians. It appeared strange and unnatural to Margaret Cheyne, that day after day she should visit the sick woman and talk of everything but that which was disturbing the minds of each, make an effort at times to discuss lightly passing events,

with the shadow of the great event to come cast across her path. Mrs. Chester, propped up by pillows in her chair, could only lay and listen, and smile faintly once or twice at the earnest efforts of her new sister to interest her; and Margaret, though she persevered, knew how vain a task it was as well as the poor sufferer lying before her crushed by the one fact. She would have been glad to learn Ada's thoughts upon the subject, and whether there were any doubts of her husband's innocence keeping back her strength: and there were times she believed less evil might have been caused by the whole history's narration.

Before the trial came on, two events occurred to keep Tenchester and the world beyond Tenchester—for there is no more fashionable topic than a murder—fixed to the one subject. A fortnight after the funeral of the curate, the Reverend John Stone was seized with a fit in the summer-

house, from which he never passed alive. His strength, his energy, even his obduracy had all failed him after his son's decease; and with nothing to live for, he had turned from all consolation and grieved himself to death. The rector was not in his grave, and the news of this first event had not become the tidings of last week, when a telegraphic message was flashed to Tenchester, with the information that Samuel Burles was captured and on his way to his old quarters.

"Dead beat it be, now," was old Burles's exclamation to Jenny, who had taken her place at his side as his daughter; "I moight ha' managed in time to get over the loss on him, but God won't ha' it."

"And they'll try to throw the parson's murder on his shoulders—see if they don't, Burles," said Jenny; "those rich, wicked lawyers, who are moving heaven and earth

to get Martin Chester off, will hang Sam for it, if they can."

"But they can't, lass."

"The innocent maun't suffer for the guilty."

"No—awful it be, that—" said Burles; "where's the old Bible—what does it say about it?"

Jenny found the Bible, and the old man put on his spectacles and pored over the dog's-eared pages, with Jenny grumbling that he was always at his Bible nonsense now.

"Suppose, Jenny, it should be Sam arter all, and you or I, or some one else nobody knows on, should have guessed it all along, and been letting Martin Chester take his place—where's the care for the innocent you and I should have then?"

"Ah, p'raps you're right! Why shouldn't stuck-up people suffer now and then?"

"God says its hard for the rich to go to heaven—He can't like 'em much."

"P'raps not," said Jenny, thoughtfully.

Old Burles sitting at the window of his room, down a court near the market, continued to pore over the Bible, and held the book to the little light that filtered from the strip of sky between the two rows of poverty-stricken houses.

"I can't find anything about it. I harn't been up to my mark with the Bible lately—it's been all a mist. I said I'd never touch it agin if luck didn't come to Sam; but luck did, which shows the good of trusting Providence. Sam got clear."

"Sometimes I wish he hadn't."

"Wish he hadn't!" exclaimed Burles, "what for? You doan't think our Sam shot the parson?"

"I doan't know—I doan't see why he should get out o' that cart and coom back; and if he had a pistol and hated young Stone, that's nothing. He wouldn't have murdered him."

“There’s nothing agin Sam now, Jenny —they know he didn’t shoot Stone; and Stone being dead, who’s to prove he set the church afoire. We shall ha’ Sam back amoong us. Right it be at last!”

Old Burles tried to assume a cheerful aspect, and looked wistfully at Jenny. But Jenny was full of forebodings; Sam had not arrived in Tenchester yet, and Sam’s trials were not over.

“He’ll make an honest woman o’ you, and you’ll live according to God’s law. And we’ll all try to be better nor we am, if we get over this.”

“—And Martin Chester’s hung, Burles,’ starting up like a fury. “If he didn’t do it, I shouldn’t like him hung, even for my Sam. I’m a fool of a woman, and a sinful woman, and doan’t know much difference ’twixt right and wrong, but I couldn’t see an honest man swinging by the neck!”

"Sit down, gal—he *must* ha' done it. You saw him last with Stone—he wor jealous of him, and thought he wor arter his wife. If any think will make one man hanker arter the life of another, it's that—I've knowed it scores of times. And that Stone wor a sneaking, pitiful scamp, that made all on us miserable in our turns. I doan't believe the sin for killing him will stand out very black agin the man that did it."

"You'd better go on with your baskets," said Jenny, gloomily.

"Unpossible that be," said Burles, shaking his head; "work bean't handy to a feller's hand when there's so much upon his mind. And here be Sam lagged—it wouldn't ha' mattered so much what they ha' said aboot Sam at the trial, if he worn't ha' been where they could get at him."

"Doan't say any more—doan't say any more," shrieked Jenny, rocking herself to and fro, and putting her fingers in her ears.

"I maun't say this—I maunt say that! Darm it, I had better be dumb at once!" cried Burles.

"You know more about Sam and that pistol than you care to tell me, old man."

"Upon my soul, I doan't," said Burles; "though, if you thought of swearing away his life, I wouldn't tell you if I did."

"There you go again—you don't, and then if you did you wouldn't!"

"Doan't I tell you Martin Chester did it—doan't the law say so, and doan't every honest man in Tenchester say the same. That Stone told me once, that the curse of a bad man falls on his own head; and he wished harm to Sam for that little bit of bonfire at St. Jude's."

"Mr. Chester had more cause nor Sam to shoot him," said the woman, giving way; "p'raps you're right enough. I'll try my hardest to believe it. Ah! he must have done it! Didn't I hear him at high words

and see him double his fist to hit at the parson, and Sam *did* go away in the cart under the sheepskins! Did I ever say he came back again—has anybody ever thought so?"

And Sam came to Tenchester again in the clutch of the law—he was a clumsy fellow at concealment, knew nothing of London, and had been lost therein. He had, as a last refuge, gone on board an emigrant ship, where he was to work his passage out to Australia, and make himself generally useful; but before his opportunities for usefulness dawned, the London detectives had strengthened their claim to be considered the sharpest fellows in the world, by fastening on one they had only had the pleasure of knowing by hearsay.

Sam was marched through the town triumphantly, and all Pleasant Street turned out to do him honour, and follow in the rear of the official *cortège*—a long proces-

sion of mourners. Sam was taken back to Tenchester Gaol, and put in a cell where the opportunities for a display of his mechanical abilities would be limited, and his time for reflection over his sins somewhat extensive.

Very little was said about the death of Geoffrey Stone, and very little curiosity Sam Burles showed respecting it. He was more concerned about the fire at St. Jude's, and how the law was going to bring it home to him. He blustered a great deal concerning his innocence, and the right he had as an innocent man to escape an unjust incarceration, and evade an examination which only "urgent private affairs" had hindered him attending.

"He didn't see why he should stand any more nonsense," was his remark; "he had been set upon for a black sheep—the parson had marked him out as a bad 'un, and tried all he could to make him bad—

that's what he had. As for firing a church, he was as innocent as a unborn babby, and everybody knowed it."

Sam Burles's examination came on a few days before the trial of Martin Chester, and the law was puzzled what to do with him. There was little doubt that his hand had been raised against St. Jude's, but the few words in support of the charge given by Geoffrey Stone on his sick-bed, unwitnessed and without being sworn to, were hardly evidence. It would not be just to commit a man upon a charge so vague; the curate might have been mistaken, and the officer who had heard only a few words from Mr. Stone, might have interpreted the invalid's assertion incorrectly, so there was left no case for the prosecution.

The magistrate was very sorry that the sudden death of Mr. Geoffrey Stone had, perhaps, allowed the real offender to escape scot-free; but there was no help for it—

Samuel Burles must shine forth to the world Not Guilty. As for the escape from prison, and the damage done to the county gaol, he would take time to consider what punishment was sufficient for the act, seeing that the man had since been proved innocent, from lack of evidence. The magistrate would take time for judgment—that is, he and his clerk would ransack the law books for a precedent, and, failing one, would write to the Secretary of State. Meanwhile, Samuel Burles was remanded; and, after three or four days' more durance vile, was acquitted, and subpœnaed the same night as a witness *for the prosecution* in the great trial coming off at Tenchester.

Sam was inclined to start to London once more: he had a horror of a witness-box, and he had heard some awful accounts of cross-examination. He could not guess what judge or jury wanted to get out of a man who had nothing to say; and if it was for the prose-

cution, why he didn't wish any harm to Martin Chester—and so he was off.

“They'll swear you shot the parson if you roon away,” said Burles. “They ha' been trying to make out you did it, all along.”

“Ha' they?” said Sam, laconically.

“They say you had a spite agin him.”

“Roight it be, as you say, old man.”

“But you didn't do it?” asked Jenny, who had been listening to the dialogue with her head against the mantel-piece, and her chair tilted into a dangerous, slant-wise position.

“Ay, say you didn't do it, and ease the lass's mind, Sam.”

Sam's temper, as we have before hinted, was not the best in the world, and opposition irritated him. If Jenny thought he had shot Geoffrey Stone, why, let her; if it would ease her mind to know he didn't, he wouldn't say anything to ease anybody's mind, without he liked. His father and the

girl seemed both very anxious that he should not leave them till the trial was over, and he was more anxious, in consequence, to shake the dust of Tenchester from his iron-clamped boots.

"What's your reason, Sam, if you're innocent?" asked Jenny.

"Ay, reason it be," said Burles.

"I'll tell you two on 'em. You may believe it or not, as you loike. First, Martin Chester's done me more nor one good turn in his loife: he did one for me the night I broke out of quod. I met him in Haselton Park, and he let me go, and said nothing, though he worn't afraid of a bullet through him. He did more nor that, too!" cried Sam, with flashing eyes—"He promised to take care of you if I got away, and help you fro' feeling lonely-like without me!"

"Martin Chester promised that?"

"Martin Chester."

"Odd it be! But"—and the old man

looked up suddenly—"you can't say anythink to hurt him?"

"I doan't know—I can't say—I'd rather be off, and not give the lawyers the chance."

"And the second reason, Sam?" said the girl, who had been paying very earnest attention to this discourse.

"Is, that I'm tired on you both, and you especially."

And, with this complimentary rejoinder, Sam Burles snatched up his rabbit-skin cap, and strode into the street, leaving Jenny in a passionate abandonment of grief, and Burles with his head between the leaves of the Bible, crying over his favourite texts.

Sam Burles marched down Pleasant Street and High Street at a very rapid rate, till his acute perceptions assured him that a slim, round-shouldered man was keeping him constantly in sight. He had first suspected this, from suddenly stopping and looking over his shoulder, and finding that man slacken his

pace, and then direct his attention to the contents of a shop window; and when he discovered the same round-shouldered individual behind him as he wound up the hill towards the railway station, Sam turned back again, and gave up leaving Tenchester as the worst of two evils.

He felt the liberty of the subject outraged by this watch on his proceedings; but, considering all circumstances, he would pocket the affront and say nothing. He would go home and bully his father, and kick Jenny if she "sarsed" him! His feelings were at explosive point, and he must find vent in some manner satisfactory to himself, if not conducive in all respects to perfect harmony.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST TWO DAYS OF THE TRIAL.

THE day of the great trial at Tenchester Assizes dawned at last, and there was high holiday at Tenchester. The public-houses in the neighbourhood of the Assize Court drove a roaring trade all day ; men out of work spent their time in hanging round the Assize Court, with women and children from Pleasant Street, and women and children who had trudged from adjacent villages to learn the earliest news. Men in work scamped business that day, and took

two hours for dinner; and several of the colliers struck, and declined business at any price. There was an extra sprinkling of fruit-stalls about the open space before the Court; and one enterprising man with penny bottles of ginger-beer, would have made his fortune if the bottles had not burst so in the sun.

Inside, the Court was crowded, and men and women were wedged together in a mass dying for fresh air, but preferring death by inches to losing a good place for which they had sat up half the night. Favoured ones were being smuggled in by cards, or by covert bribes to fee-loving officials, always willing to find room for gentlemen with half-crowns in their hands; and a few of the blessed—of a higher order of aristocracy than Nature's—were on the bench near the Judge. The lawyers and “the writing men,” as the country people called them, were at the tables below; and Martin

Chester, very pale and calm, stood at the bar a prisoner charged with murder.

Murder! The trees beyond the open windows might have been rustling the name, and the bee that had strayed in and was "worriting" the nose of a reporter might be humming it to itself.

The trial began, and the counsel for the prosecution rose and dashed into the case, with an eloquence and earnestness that showed how much more he cared to make an effective speech for the papers, than for the prisoner's innocence or guilt. Let him charge home and gain the verdict from that jury yonder, and so many more hundred guinea briefs for him in this world!

People in London would be looking for his speech to-morrow and discussing the merits of his argument, and his future depended upon it as much as Martin Chester's. He did not care one tittle whether the prisoner were really guilty or innocent,

I have said ; but he cared to see the black cap on the Judge's head—the sign of his own success.

Martin heard the old story again, and listened heart-sick to the grim detail of all the accidents and chances that had placed him in the felon's dock ; and to the ingenious manner in which this orator pieced them together, and tinted them here and there with suppositions of his own, that gave a darker shading to the facts, and startled him with their distinctness. Martin could almost believe that he was really guilty, and that God had mercifully deprived him of the memory of the act. For a moment he glanced towards the jurymen, as if to read on their faces what impression the counsel for the prosecution had made ; and then, ashamed of the action as betraying too much fear, he looked away again before he had time to read his chances there.

It was a long speech, and it was striking twelve when the last words of the speaker were ringing in his ears—calling on the jury to condemn him from the unmistakable proofs of guilt to be shortly laid before them, proofs which had been materially strengthened since the prisoner's committal.

The first witness called was his wife's servant, who testified to his excitement, to his inquiries respecting who was in the house with Mrs. Chester, to the bitter "*Never*," and the dark looks with which he had gone away. The woman had been a faithful servant of the house of Chester, and any remark elicited from her that seemed to influence her master's fate brought the tears raining down her cheeks. The examination was long and severe, and exposed her key-hole propensities, and drew from her all that she had learned from that source, which was sufficient to show that

Martin Chester and his wife had lived unhappily together, and parted with many angry words.

Martin's counsel could not turn the scale in his client's favour from this witness ; she testified readily enough to the natural goodness of heart of Martin Chester, but she could not disprove that he was an unyielding man, hard and severe at times, and inclined to let nothing balk him. The witnesses who had appeared at the first examination followed—the working men who had seen him beneath the trees, the clerk from his warehouse who had been strolling late about the lanes, and who, it was found out by cross-examination, had had an assignation that night with Mr. Grimley's parlour-maid. These damning evidences seemed to sink into the heart of every listener, and the judge was busy at his notes, checking one by one the links that formed the complete whole, and which would strike with terrible force in the

final summing up. The crowd in the Court looked grave, for it was evident the dastardly murder had been brought home to Martin Chester. To go away, return, and conceal himself for revengeful purposes amongst the trees; there only wanted one more proof to decide the wavering, and that Jenny Estfield stood forth to give.

When she had deposed to meeting the curate and Mr. Chester together, and to hearing the high words between them; to noting the raised hand of the accused, and the defensive attitude of the man afterwards found murdered on the high-road, murmurs ran through the Court that there was great difficulty in checking.

A cross-examination similar to that which Jenny had been treated with before Martin's committal followed; and Jenny got bewildered in her after-statements concerning Samuel Burles's journey to London, and by a few evasive answers

shook, to a certain extent, the case for the prosecution.

It was the dusk of evening when the witness was allowed to leave the box, and the judge adjourned the trial till the morrow. The judge withdrew, the lawyers gathered up their papers and went out laughing together—the half-baked public streamed into the street, and spoiled the profits of the *Tenchester Herald*, by retailing all the news on kerb-stones, round the pens in the market-place, and over sundry mugs of ale in bar-parlours and tap-rooms; and the prisoner, closely guarded, went back to his lonely cell, and to his gloomy forebodings of the morning.

The second day of the trial saw the Court, if possible, more crowded than the first. There were a few new faces amidst the mass; but the experience of heat and pressure had not deterred the greater number of yesterday's sight-seers.

One old man who had been the earliest to rush in when the doors were opened the previous day, was again at his post in the foremost row, and had been up half the night to get there. His son, Sam, was to be put in the witness-box, and he was very anxious to hear his statement, and see how the lawyers would serve him.

When silence in the Court had been obtained with some difficulty, and Martin was again prepared for the worst, the name of "Margaret Cheyne" was called out in the Court, and re-echoed along the passages.

Miss Cheyne stepped into the witness-box and stood prepared for all interrogatories. The counsel for the prosecution had expected great things from this witness; she was Mrs. Chester's friend, and knew more of the Chester troubles than most people, but the prosecution was doomed to disappointment. She could only honestly depose to the love existent between Martin and Ada, and to the

better feelings in Martin's heart towards the wife from whom he had separated. He had left Miss Cheyne on the night of the murder full of hope in a better life for himself and his wife, and the counsel was more anxious to get rid of this witness than the legal gentleman retained for the defence, who seized his advantage, and kept Miss Cheyne in the witness-box, and made stock for Martin Chester.

The tide seemed inclined to turn—for there was no mistaking Miss Cheyne's earnestness—when there was a stir amongst the crowd, and no indignant call for “Silence in the Court!” could stop for a moment the loud murmuring.

Martin turned his face toward the spot whence the noise proceeded, and saw the people make way for a slight figure that advanced with feeble steps to the front, leaning on the arm of one who appeared to be a maid-servant. There was no mistaking that figure,

though to Martin it was like one that had risen from the dead—the figure of his lost wife Ada !

Ada Chester took her place by the side of Richard Burles, who neither looked in her direction, nor appeared to have remarked the stir amidst the people at his side. How white she was, and what a difficulty Martin had in keeping down the great cry in his heart at seeing her.

“My doing, my doing!” he muttered ;
“and she braves all to come and see me once again.”

Their eyes met for a single instant, and that sad glance, telling of so much sorrow, and yet of so much love, nearly unmanned him. He turned away his agitated face, and looked towards the judge. In that one look he had seen enough to assure him she believed him guiltless of the crime ; and he felt he could even bear the sentence “Guilty” now, and not feel wholly desolate.

It was soon known throughout the Court that Mrs. Chester had braved all opposition, all medical advice, and left her sick-bed for that one sight of her husband ; and her appearance there woke up more sympathy for Martin than that evidence in his favour which the prisoner's skilful counsel was extracting.

Ada paid great attention to the evidence, and for more than an hour kept her place by Richard Burles, with her great eyes turning from the counsel to Miss Cheyne and back again, never losing sight of the last speaker, save to glance timidly once or twice towards the prisoner. Once the maid-servant leaned forward and whispered something, and Ada shook her head impatiently.

Before the examination was at an end, a cry from Martin checked for a few moments the progress of the trial.

"See to her, she is fainting!" rang through the Court, and at the same instant Ada dropped. A slight scream from the woman

who had caught Ada in her arms, and then, by dint of a little compression, room was made for Mrs. Chester to be borne from the Court to the carriage waiting outside, and Martin watched her till the people closed in again, and shut her from his sight. Was it for ever?—or would a day or two see the end of his trial and the beginning of better times? And yet that face was very pale and deathlike—spoke more of heaven than earth to him!

And that one natural cry of Martin's, evincing all the old love for the wife, helped still more to interest the world of Tenchester in his favour, than even the glowing speech of the counsel for the defence on the third day of the trial. Yes, there was another day of suspense for Martin, the rest of the second day being devoted to the examination of the remaining witnesses for the prosecution, the discoverer of the body, the surgeon, the

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men who had arrested Martin, Mr. Grimley, a gamekeeper of Lady Cheyne's, and Samuel Burles.

Mr. Grimley had only to depose to the scene in the confessional, and to Martin's excitement concerning it, which was a story that everybody had tired of. It did not show any malice prepense of the prisoner's, only an honest indignation at the encroachments at St. Jude's. Get out of that witness-box as quickly as you can, old gentleman, and let us have something fresh.

Robert Jones, gamekeeper to Lady Cheyne, deposed to leaving his cottage early on the evening of the murder. Was positive that a pair of pistols, loaded, hung over the mantelpiece when he left the house. On his return discovered the cottage had been entered and one pistol taken away. Had not seen the pistol since. The evidence of Robert Jones did

not appear to affect the prisoner in any way, unless proofs were forthcoming of Martin having been seen in the vicinity of the gamekeeper's cottage. Call Samuel Burles.

Samuel Burles slouched into the witness-box accordingly, and looked round him with a very unamiable expression of countenance. He did not know what they wanted with him there, and he felt uncomfortable. He would take his oath to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; but if he could get off easily, or help Martin Chester easily with a good round lie, he did not intend to be very nice about it. On the night of the 14th of June he escaped from Tenchester gaol. He did not escape for any particular reason, save that he had an objection to gaol; he was perfectly satisfied of his innocence, but he thought he would like to get away and

save parson Stone and everybody else unnecessary trouble. He escaped before dark, because there was a chance of getting away, there being a disturbance with a refractory prisoner at the other end of the prison. Which road did he take?—No road at all; he struck into Tenchester Park, where he hid till nightfall. Did he meet anyone in the park? Sam hesitated. Did he meet anyone in the park? was the question asked a second time, in a peremptory tone, that made Master Burles's blood boil, and fire him with a propensity to punch the counsel's head and swear at him.

"No!" said Samuel Burles, at last.

He had no particular reason for the falsehood, but he thought the lawyer extremely anxious to prove he did meet some one, and he was not inclined to satisfy his curiosity. Of course the less he saw of Martin Chester the better, and so he

uttered the No stoutly, and rejoiced in the counsel's crest-fallen expression of visage.

He was on his oath remember. The question was repeated for the third time, and he said No again. He would swear he did *not* meet Martin Chester?—Certainly he would. He might stand down then? No, he might not stand down yet; the counsel for the defence of Martin Chester was on his legs, and eying Sam intently. Here was a rare chance to turn the scale, and direct attention in a new direction.

How long was he in Tenchester Park?—Some hours. Till dark?—Yes. Did he keep to one place?—Almost. Did he remember some one calling him as he came out of the gamekeeper's cottage? Sam stared at this question—it threw him off his guard at once. He did not remember anybody calling him there. He remembered going into the cottage?—Yes.

Great sensation in Court, and much whispering, which had to be checked by stern torian demands for "Silence!" All eyes on Samuel Burles, who, now aware of the trap into which he had fallen, stood and ground his white teeth, and turned purple with rage.

What did he go into the cottage for?—T. To see the time. He did not take away a pistol?—Damned if he did. (Prisoner called to order by the Judge, and threatened with summary punishment for contempt of Court.) On his oath he swore that?—Yes. At what hour did he leave the park?—At a late hour—he could not tell exactly. Did he cross the park and come out near Martin Chester's villa?—No. Did he meet any one on the road?—No. Did he go to London in a cart, under a pile of sheep-skins?—Yes. Would he swear he did not leave the cart that night?—Yes. He might stand down.

The remaining witnesses for the prosecution were examined, and the day closed a

little more hopefully for Martin. Still he would not delude himself with hope—the scales might have turned a little in his favour, but what a mass of circumstantial evidence there was to weigh down before the twelve grave-faced men, who were his Destiny, could say “Not Guilty.” Were he to change places with a juryman to-morrow, and hear such evidence against the man as he had heard against himself, he felt he could not on his oath give a fair verdict of acquittal. Martin, however, in his great trouble, was not selfish; the image of his sick wife troubled him more than the uncertainty of the future, and he was allowed to see his brother Frank, and hear the latest news of her.

“She is suffering from the shock, of course,” said Frank, “and to-day’s effort has been almost too much for her; but still she’s better than I expected, Martin, and that is saying a great deal.”

"She is a brave woman!"

"There will be no more quarrels when—
this trouble has been surmounted, Martin."

"Ah!—*when*," responded Martin.

Frank was too sanguine concerning the result of the trial; he thought judge and jury must have his feelings and his sympathy with the accused—be as equally convinced of Martin's innocence, despite the strange chances that seemed to point to Martin as the murderer. Had Martin been sanguine at this time, Frank Chester's affirmation of better days would have been more doubtful policy. But his earnest assurance of Martin achieving a victory over his accusers, lightened perhaps a little the brother's despondency; and though it gave him no hope in the result, yet it strengthened his courage to endure, knowing the one or two true hearts who would trust him to the last.

Would to-morrow be the last?—see the end of all hope for him, and consign him

o the scaffold on the roof of that gaol in which he was a prisoner? What were the twelve men locked away from home and wife and children, till the trial was over, sinking of the case?—did his position sit heavily upon them, or did they treat it as a thing of every day, and dismiss it from their thoughts when they retired from the jury box? Pshaw!—he would think no more of himself; in the silence and darkness of that narrow cell let him kneel to his Maker and pray that the health and strength of his poor suffering wife might be mercifully restored.

CHAPTER III.

THE ISSUE OF THE TRIAL.

THE third day. The same idleness and gossiping about the streets, the same brisk trade in beer and spirits at the public-houses, the same crowd round the Assize Court, the same scene within doors, where the judge, jury, prisoner, witnesses, lawyers, and representatives of the people and the press, were formally assembled. Even the tall gray-haired man was there, in the old place; and his presence in the one spot—always foremost, always attentive to the progress of the evidence—had rendered him a familiar

object at the trial. His son Sam, of whom he had seen nothing since yesterday, and who had spent the night in the tap-room of the "Peaceful Rest," drinking perdition to lawyers, had got over his examination after a fashion; but Jenny Estfield was suddenly required as a witness for the defence, and the old man had taken his place at the doors before daylight, and been the first to tumble his way in to his usual place.

Jenny Estfield was the first witness called by Martin's counsel, after a long and telling speech, in which, with more confidence, perhaps, than he really felt, he told the whole story as Martin had related it, and expressed his power to dispel every suspicion attempted to be thrown upon the prisoner. He believed he could show that the perpetrator of the deed was still at large, and that a man, innocent in act or thought, stood before them at the bar. He would call Jenny Estfield again. Jenny came reluctantly into

the witness-box, and looked wistfully towards old Burles, and from Burles to the judge, at whose fixed gaze she cast down her eyes. Jenny was more nervous than usual, and the very uncertainty of the shape her examination might take, kept her perplexed. Martin's counsel would remind her she was on her oath—would remind her of the awful sin of swearing away the life of an innocent man, or of keeping back some portion of a truth which might save him from the gallows. Where had she been on the night of the 14th of June?—For a walk. On her oath, had she seen Samuel Burles that night?—No answer. With the consciousness of God listening to every word she uttered, would she deny having met him in Haselton Park?—She had not met him in Haselton Park. Where had she met him?—No answer, and great excitement in the Court; the counsel for the prosecution seeing many hundred guinea briefs fading into

thin air, and the judge calling on her to reply.

“As I hope to God!” exclaimed the girl, at last, “I met him too far away to do the murder! It was two mile away, and he was going in the other direction, towards Meldon.”

“You stated in former evidence that you took some things for him—was that a fact?”

“Yes.”

“And gave those things into the hands of a man departing from Tenchester market with sheep-skins?”

“Yes.”

“How did you know where to meet the man?—or that the man had any knowledge of Samuel Burles’s whereabouts?”

“The man knew Sam had escaped—Sam had sent him for the things, and some money—all I had.”

“And, after giving those things and the money, and learning from the man where

Burles would be at a certain time, you went in search of him?"

"Yes."

"And had a long interview?"

"No—a short one."

"On the subject of Mr. Geoffrey Stone?"

"No!" cried the woman, energetically—"on the subject of taking me to London, and not leaving me after all he'd promised, and all I'd done for him! Not a word of Geoffrey Stone, by God! He never harmed a hair of his head!"

"And Samuel Burles would not take you to London?"

"No."

"And you saw him go off in the cart with the sheep-skins?"

"Yes."

"But the cart with the sheep-skins was proceeding on the London road, and you have just told us you parted with Sam, who was making for Meldon."

Jenny panted, and glared at the counsel, and clutched at the sides of the witness-box.

"That was afterwards," she murmured.

"Afterwards?"

"Yes. The patrols were galloping about, and Sam fearing they would search the cart, thought he would go on first to Meldon."

"What did he want with you again?"

"To tell me not to fret about him—that he worn't worth it. That he couldn't take me with him then, without being sure to be caught, and that he would write to me when he reached London—which he didn't."

"How far was the spot where your last interview took place from Haselton Park?"

"About a mile."

"What was the name of Samuel Burles's accomplice?"

"She did not remember."

“Was it Wilton?”

“She was not certain.”

Call John Wilton.

The news that strong evidence was rising against Samuel Burles spread from the Court into the town; and Samuel Burles, who had been hanging about the streets, felt inclined to set out on a long walk, and not come back again. But that would make everybody think he had shot Mr. Geoffrey Stone, and those who were watching him already—he was sure he was watched—would immediately lay hands on him. Besides, an honest man could live suspicion down, and he was honest as the day!

John Wilton, a bullet-headed man in a butcher's blue smock, came with great alacrity into the witness-box. He was engaged in the markets; he remembered the 14th of June very well; he had to carry a load of sheepskins to Banks, the

tanner's, twenty miles on the London road. He was running across the park, against the laws, to make a short cut to the market, when Sam Burles hailed him. Knew Sam Burles very well ; had attended cock-fights and rat-hunts with him. Was present at a supper-party the night of Sam's release from prison, when Sam had vowed vengeance against Geoffrey Stone, and expressed a wish "to do for him." Was glad to see him in Haselton Park, and offered to give him a lift later in the evening, if he liked to hide under the sheepskins. Carried a message to Jenny Estfield. Later in the evening, took up Sam Burles, who went a little way with him, till he heard the patrols galloping about the roads ahead, and asking too many questions of the passers by. Pulled up and advised Sam' Burles to get out, and saw Sam Burles run back after Jenny Estfield, who had come to see him off. *Remembered*

that Sam Burles had a pistol with him, because he took care of it till Sam got out of the cart again. Rather an old-fashioned pistol, and he should say the fellow one to that which was produced. Could not account for giving up his situation the night after the murder, and proceeding at once to London. Fancied change of air perhaps.

John Wilton was subjected to a severe cross-examination ; but there was little further to elicit from him, and he kept to the main truths of his story with a persistence there was no shaking.

There was little doubt which way the tide was turning now ; the jury seemed to breathe with greater freedom, and the crowd in the Court began to whisper Samuel Burles's name more often. The counsel for the prosecution appeared to think the evidence of no weight, but the legal gentleman for the defence wore a complacent smile.

The evidence in support of Martin's character and previous habits was suppressed or hurried over by the defence—time must not be left to weaken the impression of the two first witnesses that day. One important fact was added by the last witness, the servant of a gentleman in the neighbourhood: he had heard the pistol-shot as he was riding towards Tenchester, and remembered passing a moment afterwards a man unlike Martin Chester. Could swear in height and figure he did not resemble Mr. Chester, but did not see his face. Did not go back when he heard the shot; had often heard shots before in Haselton Park, which was much patronized by poachers.

During the summing up of the judge not a whisper was heard, or a paper rustled; and Martin felt how much the evidence of that day had told in his favour by the importance attached to it by the judge. There

was hope in the judge's words, and he felt his heart beating a little quicker as the jury, one by one, retired from the Court. Some whispering after the jury had retired, and one or two bets, with odds in Martin's favour, from speculative gentlemen who had money to invest. Old Burles kept his place in the foremost row, and neither moved nor spoke. He was looking straight across at Martin, and did not turn his head till the murmuring at his side apprised him of the jury's return.

"How say you, gentlemen, do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

"NOT GUILTY."

Old Burles gave vent to a shout which startled all within the Court, and drew the attention of all upon himself.

"That's death to Sam! He'll be murdered! Let me pass," he muttered incoherently, as he fought a passage for himself with his clenched hands, and sent

younger and stronger men reeling right and left.

But the crowd within the Court, the prisoner at the bar, the judge upon the bench, the triumphant and defeated counsel, had something else to think of than the eagerness of one man to escape into the free air; and Burles went unmolested on his way to warn his son of danger.

“Not Guilty!”

“Thank God!” murmured Martin, and he looked upon the ground to hide the emotion visible on his face. Thank God not alone for his escape, but for the new life opening unto him; where, taught by the stern lessons of the past, he might seek out his wife, and become a better man and truer husband!

CHAPTER IV.

OLD BURLES BURNS HIS BIBLE.

OLD Burles pushed his way through the crowd assembled in the open space before the Assize Court, and made his way, with all possible haste, to his rooms near Pleasant Street—to which low quarters the reader has been already conducted, let us hope not very much against his will. It was sundown when Burles pulled the string that hung from the centre of the door, and admitted himself into his apartments. The room was always dark at sundown ; the gaunt houses, two yards in front, excluded light as well as

air, and the strip of sky high up across the house-tops seemed more for ornament than use after the sun had passed meridian. Turning from the broad streets into his little room, it seemed nigh dark to Burles, and he called out "Sam, Sam!" twice, as if doubtful whether his hopeful offspring were in hearing or not.

Sam was not in hearing, and there was no sign of Jenny. The old man having found that out at last, smote the rickety deal-table with his hand, and gave vent to an oath worthy of Sam himself.

"Alas! the way it be," he said, in a loud soliloquy; "out of the way and at the devil's game when he be wanted most, and when another hour may be too late. And Jenny, too—I can't expect to see her here again. She's hanged the boy—she and that cursed Wilton—may she die the death of a dog!"

He dropped into the cane-bottomed chair

near the window, and leaned his head upon his hands a moment ; then he sprang up with remarkable celerity, pitched his cap to the other end of the room, and groped for a box of lucifers and a candle in a ginger-beer bottle on the mantelpiece. Having found the lucifers and lighted the candle, he took the dog's-eared Bible, drew his chair before the empty grate, and placed the extemporary candlestick on the hob.

“It's not a bit o' good. I ha' done my best—I ha' done my worst, and the long run makes it all the same! Devil a bit nearer to what's right, or to affording an old man what it calls comfort, peace of mind, or righteousness. I ha' done with it. I wor a fool to think it'd ever do me good—a book I couldn't understand, and that no one would explain.”

He had torn out half-a-dozen leaves, and was holding them in the flame of the candle, when a hand was laid upon his arm.

"What are you doing, Burles?" said a woman's voice.

"Ne'er you mind—you ha' nothin' to do wi' me or mine, now. You can go."

"I wouldn't burn the Bible."

"Ha' it ever done me good?—ha' it ever made you anything but what people point their fingers at, and drag their children to the tother side on 'em? Get out!"

"There's something awful in the burning on it," said the woman, sadly; "it maun be unlucky—it maun bring a heap o' trooble."

"I've foond it bring me harm, and I did try hard once to make a man of myself. Oh, that Sam!"

"Poor Sam!" said the girl.

"Doan't *poor* him—you've hung him, and you ought to be satisfied noo."

"I've said nothing but the truth—I'm half mad. I doan't know what I have been a saying on."

"You ha' hung him," repeated Burles, proceeding with his work of demolition.

"I arn't borne false witness agin him—doan't say I've hung him, Burles."

"Where is he?"

"I doan't know—I've coom here to meet him. I want to see him very much. My brain's going."

"Let it go!" said Burles. "there," as he consigned the blazing paper to the grate, "quits it be with that to begin with—now, quits wi' you, my fine young fancy gal. There's the door!"

"No, no, Burles, don't send me away till I've seen Sam—till I've asked him to forgive me, if I've done him any harm."

"There be the door! You ha' murdered my innocent boy, and left me an old, childless man—and I loved that boy so much!"

"I lost my soul for him years ago."

"So ha' I!" shouted Burles; "and there be my warrant for it in the grate. I ha'

lost my soul, and there be no more good for me in Bibles! But as for you—if Sam doan't put you from the door and fling you in the street, I wull."

"Let Sam tell me to go then. Let me wait for him."

"Not here," said the determined old man.

Jenny looked wistfully into the inflexible face of the speaker, and saw there was no help for it but to go. Better to go then, and throw herself on the clemency of Samuel Burles in the streets, or at the "Peaceful Rest," than meet him with that stern old man. The "Peaceful Rest"—ah! Sam might already have gone thither; let her fly to him at once!

The same idea appeared to have suddenly suggested itself to the old man; for putting Jenny as completely from his thoughts as he had from the shelter of his home, he muttered—

"Mayhap, drinking he be. He was alas a good un for drink, when the fit wor on him."

Burles went into the open air again, and up the two steps of the court into the street, perfectly unconscious that he was proceeding along bare-headed. The incidents of the last three days, the long attendance at the Court, the early and late hours, appeared to have impaired his memory and disturbed his mind, for he stared vacantly at men who had known him all their lives, and who gave him "good evening, Burles," as he passed by. Pleasant Street had turned into the gutters to talk about the trial and that old man's son; but Burles was dead to anything unusual, as he scuffled along the narrow pavement towards the "Peaceful Rest."

Through the narrow, dirt-begrimed doors, and past the bar into the tap-room, where sat Sam Burles enthroned upon the table,

with his long legs swinging recklessly, and one hand, with a clay pipe in it, stretched forth oratorically. Five or six of his old mates were standing about the room, gazing at him and considering him very drunk; and Jenny was crouched against the wall near the door, where she had been violently flung at an earlier stage of the proceedings.

"They maun say what they please to get a man off—that be law, and I'm not sorry—but it ain't law to bring me into the scrape agin, and they woan't do it."

"But they wull," said old Burles, as he entered, "they woan't leave you half-an-hour—didn't you hear how they turned upon you at the trial?"

"They can't prove anything agin an innocent man," hiccuped Sam.

"Be off, then—as yea're a good son, go!" implored the father; "for every minute be

an object. Why they ha' left you so long poozzles me."

"Because they're sure of me," said Sam, defiantly—"because I ha' tried, and can't move hand or limb without some cursed constable turning up at every corner. It's all up with getting away, if I warnted—and I doan't warnt."

"Do go, Sam!" implored Jenny from the corner.

"What! arn't you had enough of it?" growled Sam; "woan't you be quiet without this quart pot at your head, you she-devil?"

"A she-devil that's been true to you, at any rate."

"Ah! so it seemed to-day."

"Ah! so it seemed," echoed old Burles; "but we maunt waste time over he or she-devils now. Try and get away, Sam, somehow, or you'll break your old father's heart. For more nor twenty years I ha' only

had you to care for. I tooked to the Bible for your sake; and though it didn't do a bit of good, still what I did it for worn't the worse thing in the world. Do go, Sam, and doan't drink any more to-night!"

"I woan't move—hollo! what's up now?"

Jenny had sprung to her feet with a shriek, and run to Sam again, and embraced his long legs with her arms.

"Oh! doan't take him away—he never killed the parson—I never said so!"

The door had opened, and there were three or four policemen in the room. Policemen seldom came to the "Peaceful Rest," or Pleasant Street, in a less number than four, when business of an important nature required a gentleman's society.

Sam Burles kept his seat on the table, and reached out his hand for the quart pot with which he had threatened Jenny. There

was a wild-beast glare about his eyes, that threatened danger to the first man who laid hands upon him.

"Sam Burles," said the first policeman, "you'd better come quietly with us."

"I think I'll make a foight for it," said he, carefully weighing the pewter measure he had taken from the table; "if you're going to hang me, I may as well crack a peeler's nut to finish off with."

"Steady now!" said the constable, producing a staff from his coat pocket.

"Be there no one here to help an old pal?" cried Sam, getting off the table, and standing on defence. The men turned away, and one muttered—"For anything but murder, Sam."

"I ha' murdered no one, you sneaking pack of cowards—I ha'——"

The policemen were on him, and he was on the ground making a vigorous use of arms and legs, with two representatives of

the law over him, and one under him with a fine impression of the quart pot between his eyes. But Sam had been taken off his guard, and was not in full force that evening, excitement and beer having rendered him less scientific than usual. After a little more scuffling there was the click of handcuffs, and then Sam was raised and stood helpless between two officers.

“What’s the charge?”

“The murder of Mr. Geoffrey Stone.”

“How many more people to be nearly hanged for that infernal parson’s death?” cried Sam; “I moight ha’ killed him if I’d met him, but I never had the chance.”

“You’ll swing for it, for all that,” said one officer maliciously, the gentleman who had been duly stamped with the common seal of the “Peaceful Rest.”

“It be a lie!” shouted old Burles; “he may swing for his own sins some day, but for

nobody else's. Here, take the irons off that boy of moine, and put 'em on the right 'un. *I shot Geoffrey Stone, as I'm a living man!*"

Jenny started up with a scream, and ran towards Sam again, till one of the amazed policemen put out his hand and kept her back.

"No tampering with the prisoner."

"Take the cuffs off him!" cried the old man. "I ha' lived for him more nor thirty year and done no good—let's see if dying can do better. I ain't afeard to die; and I deserve it—for I shot the parson loike a dog!"

"I knew it!—I knew it!" murmured Jenny.

"Ay, *you* dooted it, but I put you off your guard. I didn't know Sam had got clear out of Tenchester gaol, and I only knowed I wor a-going mad with the thought o' the morrow when Geoffrey Stone would be wull eno' to swear away Sam's life. He wor the only

witness agin my boy; and I hunted him down that night, and followed him for hours, and waited till he coomed out of Mrs. Chester's house, and he and Maister Chester ha' had their quarrel out, and he was all aloon and at my mercy. Then I foired—and oh, good Lord! to see him reel and drop!”

“We have no warrant for your arrest, Burles,” said one policeman; “and we dare not release your son on your single statement, and after his showing fight and smashing heads. Will you come quietly with us, and state your case at the station-house?”

“I wull,” said the old man. “I’m tired o’ life, and there be young blood there,” pointing to Sam, “that maun’t be shed for my loikes. P’raps you’ll live to be a better man now, Sam?”

“Too late, old man.”

“Noa,” emphatically exclaimed Burles, “it arn’t! It be thinking it wor too late that’s doon for me. I thought it wor too late

before I foired over Haselton Park fence—I'd growed mad and reckless, and gi'en up the Bible! I didn't know how dark and awfu' every thing would be, even if you got off, Sam, till I wor looking at that dead mon's face! It wor all over then with me!"

"Ay, wi' *him* too," muttered Sam.

"Tired of life it wor, then," continued Burles. "No more hand to the work—no more rough prayers, such as they were, for you and I, up abuv;—it wor all over! I could drink then; I could be sorry for Martin Chester, though I wouldn't ha' saved him," he added maliciously—"for he wished you harm, Sam, and would gi'e me no advarse. I kept my secret all to myself, hoping it would grow brighter arter a toime, and you and me were together agin. And it growed heavier, and broke me down!"

"You'd better come with us, Burles, and tell all this to the inspector."

"I'll coom—I'm not afeard," replied

Burles. "I shall be glad to gi'e the boy a longer lease of loife, and shorten moine. You'll foind the gun I shot him with in Harner's mill-pond, further on the roight. I'm ready !"

"Oh, father! though you've saved Sam, I'm so sorry for you!" cried Jenny. "When you was talking in your sleep one night, I listened at your room, and thought you might ha' done it. Oh! you've been hard on me, but I'm so very sorry!"

And this poor ignorant woman wrung her hands piteously.

"It be all your fault, moind," said Burles, unmoved by Jenny's sympathy. "Toired of loife as I be, it's all your fault, and Wilton's, that didn't save us both. Remember that, Sam, when you're out agin, and hate her!"

"No, no!" shrieked the woman—"you woan't, Sam! I left all for you, Sam—years ago—even my old mother who was blind—and I've been true to you all my life!"

"You're a Jazzy-bill!" said the inveterate old man, "and I woan't forgie you, and Sam shan't. I ne'er forgi'ed the parson turning me out o' house and home, and I can't forgie you for hanging on me. I am toired of loife, desperately toired—but I'd rather not been hanged for all that! I be ready," he growled. "What are you all waiting for?"

The policemen with their prisoner moved on, and forced their way through the crowd that had now assembled in the tap-room and choked up the passages of the "Peaceful Rest." Old Burles followed, and the marked policeman brought up the rear with the quart pot that had levelled him to mother earth retained as evidence.

Jenny struggled her way through the old friends of the Burles's on whom the word of "murder" had fallen like a spell, and joined the crowd that followed at the heels of the officials and their prisoners, and saw the last of them through the station-house door.

Some delusive idea that Sam Burles would be immediately released, kept her hanging about the doors, notwithstanding the remonstrance of the law. The crowd dispersed, the night grew late, the shopkeepers put up their shutters and took their tills into their bedrooms—a thick misty rain began to drizzle down and soak through Jenny's scanty garments, and hang in beads from the hair that straggled from her bonnet. Too late for anything but Jenny's hope of Sam's deliverance, which kept her watchful in the streets till morning, and found her cowering in a doorway across the road; and hopeful still, when the day's business began again, the tills returned to the counters, and the shop-shutters concealed no more the goodly stores of Tenchester.

In all her sin and weakness, shame and ignorance, was not this a true woman? Shadow of woman in her best estate, perhaps, but true and constant in adversity, having in

her nature all the seeds of good, and which, for want of sound training, fair encouragement and helping hands, remained but seeds, and never turned a flower to heaven.

How many like this woman living and dying every day, and how many Pharisees amongst us passing on the other side!

CHAPTER V.

ONE RESULT OF TRACTARIANISM.

FAST dropped the sands through the glass, and on plodded the great destroyer Time, taking no heed of the joys and sorrows following every step. So many minutes to an hour, and so many hours to a week—not such a beam of happiness on this day, and such a thunderbolt of grief on that. Count the drifting sands, but not the trials and troubles of the lives drifting away with them.

Time cleared up the mystery of Geoffrey

Stone's death, and brought the murderer, despite his confession, to the scaffold on Tenchester gaol, and ended a strange story under the blue sky, with several thousand people looking on. And there was one man amidst that crowd of ghastly sight-seers who alone turned away impressed and thoughtful, not so much by the spectacle—for it is a hideous spectacle that has wrought more harm than good—but by the remembrance of the motives that placed that pinioned figure there, and saved him from its place. He had been a fierce and selfish man for many years of life, and that fierceness and selfishness never wholly dropped away, notwithstanding he repented truly of an evil past, and went abroad to an English colony, taking a woman named Jenny with him. That woman made him a good wife in the backwoods, and taught him to read and write in the long evenings, when the "Peaceful Rest" was thousands of miles away, and accommodation for man and

beast—especially beast—was only offered by the forest land around them.

Sam and his wife were not the happiest couple in the world perhaps, but they were far from the most unhappy, and they could not have lived a day apart without praying for the morrow to unite them. They had their quarrels; Sam had his fits of passion and Jenny her aggravating moods, but they lasted a very little while in that wild country, where mutual help was needed every hour, and where to sulk with one another was to lose the sound of the human voice. Sam had sought the wildest and most uncultivated part of the colony; he had been fond of society, and there was some self-imposed punishment in shutting himself from company and beer. It was transporting himself for life, and making some little amends to society for burning down St. Jude's. And if the reader has not

forgiven Samuel Burles for that act, or set down in extenuation the ignorance of his benighted mind, why, he is only of Sam Burles's opinion, who to this day has not pardoned himself the crime.

Sam's last interview with his father worked all the change in him. The old man's love for him, the little journey from the condemned cell to the roof of the gaol that lay before his father on the morrow, the old man's entreaties not to let Sam's evil heart and hasty hands bring him to a fate like his, the old man's penitence, touched the hitherto inflexible heart of the son. Old Burles in his prison, attended by the chaplain—who was the first to detect the true nature of the man, and to mourn over its moral wreck—was persuaded to open a Bible again, and to believe in mercy and repentance. He became anxious to see Jenny, and forgive her, if there were anything to forgive;

and his last wish was, that Sam should go abroad and take Jenny as his wife.

So old Burles was hanged ; and Sam obeyed his father's wishes, and went away across the seas with Jenny Estfield. And Tenchester was very glad to see the back of him.

Meanwhile St. Jude's was pulled down, and in progress of reconstruction, and—Martin Chester and his wife were still apart ! The effects of High Church doctrine had not ended with Martin's acquittal, and there was still one grim child born of the Tractarian feud, which kept husband and wife asunder—disease.

Ada Chester had been taken back to her home in the dead stupor that commenced in the Assize Court, and had recovered from it after many hours to find the world a blank with her, to believe a hundred wild improbabilities, and to know nothing of the truth.

“She may get well—she may recover her reason—she may die,” were the physician’s opinions; “in cases like these there is no certainty. Perfect quiet may save her—a sudden shock will assuredly kill her.”

Therefore Martin Chester had to keep to his bachelor quarters, and wait and pray for better health to Ada. Fearful that his voice might alarm her, or his presence at her bedside produce the sudden shock against which she had been warned, Miss Cheyne—chief nurse to Ada, who left not her side all day, and slept in the room all night, prepared for the worst—would not allow of Martin’s presence in the house; and Martin, knowing how much depended on his own discretion, mastered his emotion and continued his old life—not, thank God, with his old heart!

Lady Cheyne, tired of Haselton House,

and yet unable to offer any objections to her daughter's errand of mercy to the sick, went away at this time to some relatives in London, and wrote to Margaret a few days afterwards to say that she had discovered such a beautiful minister, and such a beautiful church, where the decorations were sublime, and the crosses many and imposing. Lady Cheyne had no more learned a moral from all that had happened at St. Jude's than any sucking Tractarian will take a warning from these pages, or believe such envy, hatred and uncharitableness could spring from a cause so simple and so pure. We are talking of the past; of a bygone time, and an ignorant pig-headed race of country folk—all is quiet in mother church, and universal harmony is the order of the day! Let us drop Lady Cheyne at this point. She and her nerves are in good hands, and the simple, unadorned faith of the Protestant is not to her taste. She likes choral

effects and floral embellishments and ceremony of all kinds, and she passes, in good or bad time, from Tractarianism to Romanism, and the Tractarians shrug their shoulders and pity her weakness. "In no one instance," writes a clerical wiseacre, who has seen further into a mile-stone than most of his predecessors or contemporaries, "has a member of the Church of England, known to be well informed in what are termed Church or Catholic principles, ever conformed to the Romish Communion." Granted this reasoning, and yet where lies the Tractarian's excuse? How many of his High Church congregation does he reckon so *well-informed* on Catholic principles, that no leaning in outward show to Romish practices can possibly weaken their hold on the true faith. If there have been no well-informed members of the Church secede—if those who preach from pulpits have NEVER, in the history of the Church, shaven their

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crowns and taken to high mass, who answers for THE FLOCK?

Turn we to Ada Chester—victim of High Church. Day by day but little progress, giving few signs of returning reason, and keeping ever alive the suspense of those who loved her. Frank Chester called twice and thrice a-day to learn the latest news, and bear it to the husband waiting impatiently for better tidings; and these frequent interviews with Miss Cheyne, the common bond of sympathy with the distressed, the remembrance of their past relation to each other, made them not unhappy meetings, or entirely devoid of hope. For them, perhaps, the future was brightening, but for Martin Chester and his wife what shadows might steal over the landscape when the sun went down! The misery and the comfort in this world are pretty equally balanced—why should people in Tenchester expect it all their own way?

And yet Martin would hope that he had had his share of trouble, and that days of less affliction were in store for him. Every day that brought him the old news, "about the same," only kept him hoping, praying for the morrow that would tell him she was better. And those earnest prayers were heard at last, and Ada Chester's reason came back one day in the autumn.

Her reason, but not her strength—whether Time, which had brought back her mind, would give her power to leave her bed was still a mystery to all but Him who ruleth Time and teacheth us its fleeting nature.

Ada's first words were "Martin—Martin!"

Margaret Cheyne was at her side, and stooping over her with a beating heart. Those tones were new to her now—she had been a stranger to them so long.

"Do you know me, Ada?"

"Margaret Cheyne!"

"Yes—don't speak again," she whispered.

“But, Martin?”

“Is well, and — safe.”

Ada shivered for a moment, but she was too weak to think of the dread past. She closed her eyes and fell asleep again, and Miss Cheyne waited anxiously for Frank and the doctor's arrival, to communicate the glad tidings.

The doctor was surprised, for he had nearly given up his belief in a re-action. He cautioned Miss Cheyne against the least excitement marring her good work; and Frank went rejoicing to High Street, and brought a prayer of thankfulness from his brother's full heart.

Ada's mind grew stronger every day, and with every day increased her desire to learn the story of her husband's escape from the scaffold. Margaret Cheyne, with some little amount of fear for the result, communicated the particulars at last; and Ada listened patiently, and betrayed no serious emotion.

"And Martin?" she asked, with a strange look at Margaret, "will he come and see me now, or does that dreadful firmness which has worked so much of evil, still keep his heart closed to me?"

"He would have no heart, dear Ada, if, remembering all that this sad estrangement has caused, and knowing the sufferings of his wife, he could still desire anything but peace and re-union."

"He desires that?" she cried, eagerly.

"Yes, yes—and in good time, when you are stronger, you and he will meet."

"When I am stronger!" she said, with a faint smile; "and who has promised me strength, or given me hope that I shall leave this bed again?"

"We all hope that."

"And if hope should prove illusive, I shall sink slowly away from this life, and never see my Martin's face again!"

"You must not grow despondent, dear."

"But I must see him."

"In a day or two—you will be better then."

"The days are precious to me, and may be few. I am so very weak!"

Too weak to speak again of Martin, till the doctor was at her side the next morning.

"Doctor," she said, suddenly, "I must see my husband."

"Impossible, my dear madam."

"Why, *impossible!*" with a look that told of an awful suspicion flashing to her mind.

"The excitement would kill you."

"I will not be excited—I give you my promise, doctor, that I will be very calm."

"In a few days."

"I have been told a few days before—you are putting me off from day to day. Doctor," in a husky whisper; "was Martin Chester really hanged for murder?"

“God forbid, my dear madam!” cried the doctor; “Martin Chester is as well and strong as I am. He is as anxious as yourself, too — so I have a pretty life between you.”

Ada gave a sigh of relief, and closed her eyes. She might really be too weak, but what a long, long time it was! The next day weaker still, and a greater effort to turn on her side and smile at Margaret Cheyne. On the evening of that day, after she had lain for a long while looking out at the sky flushed with the sunset, she called Margaret to her side.

“Margaret,” she said: “this is the weakness of death.”

“Oh! no, no—not that.”

“Slowly, surely on the journey to the far-off world, where all the troubles and trials of this are motes in the sunbeam. I feel it now too well!”

Margaret said nothing. There was some-

thing on Ada's face that night which told of the far-off world she spoke of—the world higher, more divine.

"The doctor may wish to spare me and Martin a long interview, may think a few moments at the last sufficient for all earthly purpose—that is not right to me or Martin. I must see Martin to-morrow."

The doctor came early in the morning, entered with his usual soft tread into the sick chamber, felt her pulse, looked a little grave, and was retiring with the usual "good morning," when Ada called him back.

"Doctor, with some invalids it is mercy to be reserved; but with others it is generous to tell the plain and simple truth. I am resigned to leave the world and my poor husband; but I would know, for my own sake and for his, how many hours are left me?"

"Madam, I cannot tell."

"There is no hope of ultimate recovery—I am right, sir?"

"I regret to say, there is no hope!"

"Thank you, for speaking plainly to me. I shall not feel the parting much, save for Martin's sake; and I think I am prepared to die."

"I am sure of it, Mrs. Chester," said the doctor, in a husky voice.

"May I ask how long you have known there was no hope for me?" said Ada.

"Yesterday and to-day there have been signs of greater weakness."

"And you would have gone away, and not warned me of the hour advancing," said Ada, reproachfully.

"I intended to apprise Miss Cheyne to-day of your dangerous weakness, and to have left it to Miss Cheyne to—ahem—ahem!"

And the good doctor tried to clear his throat, and look firm and decided.

"There is no objection to seeing my husband now, sir?"

"There is great danger in excitement."

"But, sir, I am not afraid of danger—only of the danger of dying without seeing my Martin once again!"

"You will not disturb yourself too much, Mrs. Chester, in that meeting?"

"No, sir—I will be very calm."

"Will you leave it till this evening?—will you take the day to prepare you for this interview?"

"If you think it best, sir," said Ada, with a sigh.

The doctor went away, and motioned silently to Margaret Cheyne, weeping bitterly in the shadow of the bed-curtains. The old doctor and the young nurse went silently downstairs; and Margaret felt that, with the taciturnity of his craft, there was still something more to tell.

"Miss Cheyne," said he, when they were standing together on the hall mat, "I have been pressed hard by Mrs. Chester, and I have answered truly all her questions, but—"

"But, sir!" repeated Margaret, her colour changing.

"But she is sinking very fast—much faster than she believes. Since yesterday there has been a great change, and I fear that twenty-four hours are not left her."

"Poor girl!" sobbed Margaret.

"To save her an excitement that must hasten her death, I have asked her to postpone the meeting with her husband till the evening; but, should you see further signs of weakness, or she complain of greater weakness, I think it would be advisable to send for him at once."

"Very well, sir."

"Should you require me, I shall be at home all day. Good morning."

The doctor departed, and whilst Margaret Cheyne was still weeping in the hall, Frank Chester arrived to receive the latest news. What Margaret Cheyne said to him during the few moments they stood together in the hall,

was sufficient to prepare him for the solemn event, and to strengthen him in the painful task of communicating it to his brother. He went away, and in half an hour, to the surprise of Miss Cheyne, Martin and he came back. All the past pallor, and some of the past sternness, was on Martin Chester's face as he crossed the hall, and went into the drawing-room—the room he had not entered since the day of the wreck!

“I did not expect you yet, Mr. Chester,” said Miss Cheyne.

“No, no! But you did not expect me to remain at business with all that I care for in the world sinking away from me,” he said, in hollow accents; “do not let me detain you, Miss Cheyne, from those generous duties you have assumed, and for which I shall be ever grateful. Take no notice of me or Frank—believe that we are not in the house till we are sent for, and I may see her once again. Oh! Frank, Frank, it *was* for ever apart that cruel day!”

"It is God's will, brother."

"I am not resigned to it yet," said he, gloomily; "hemmed in on every side by Fate, it is not man's nature to sit down content."

"Still ——."

"Oh! let me think," he said, impatiently, "I am not here to argue."

He leaned back heavily in his chair, folded his arms across his chest, and looked sternly before him—perhaps at the Fate which he said was hemming him in.

Margaret Cheyne returned upstairs to her watch; sat down by the bedside, and looked at Ada lying there so still and thoughtful.

"Is it evening yet?" asked Ada at last.

"No, morning still."

"Oh, dear," sighed Ada—"only morning!"

"Do you feel weaker, Ada?" inquired anxiously Miss Cheyne.

"No, about the same, Margaret," was the reply—"only the hours are gliding by so

slowly, and suspense is very hard to bear. Will you read to me?"

Margaret took the Bible from the dressing-table, and commenced reading. Ada lay and listened. Presently she felt the thin hand of the sick woman touching her own gently, and she looked round with a start, and dropped the book.

"Oh! Ada, you are feeling weaker," cried Margaret, bending over the changed face.

"Yes."

"Shall I send for Martin now?"

"If you please," returned Ada; and then added, with a sigh, "Oh! if I had but seen him once again!"

"Be calm, my dear—he is in the house. He has been waiting to see you some hours now."

"I am so glad! That was very kind of him to come and wait for me. And Margaret," half fearfully, "is he very stern and firm to-day?"

"No, no! God forbid."

"I should so like to see him *now*."

Margaret hurried from Ada's side, and went swiftly down the stairs into the room where Martin and Frank sat facing each other, with their arms crossed and their gloomy looks bent downwards. Martin sprung to his feet as the door opened, and Miss Cheyne appeared.

"Will you come upstairs, Mr. Chester, now?" said Miss Cheyne.

"I am prepared," he answered—"the rustle of your dress a moment since told me I was wanted."

"Courage, Martin, in yourself," murmured Frank, without looking up—"and faith in your God who knows what is best."

"Ah! you're a good brother."

And Martin went upstairs after Miss Cheyne, with a slow and hopeless tread. Into the sick chamber, Miss Cheyne a few paces in advance.

"Are you prepared to see him now, Ada?"

"Yes."

"You will not give way at the last—he is weak, like yourself?" whispered Margaret.

"No, I will not give way. I am too weak to give way now—and oh, God!" she prayed, earnestly, "give me strength to teach my Martin resignation!"

The curtain was drawn back, and Martin stood there. He who had loved her so once, and fought so hard to win her; he who had been so stern and fought so hard to lose her—God comfort him, it was the troubled face of a child.

"My poor Martin!"

"Oh! my poor murdered Ada."

As he bent over her to kiss her, and she saw the hot tears raining down, she stole one arm round his neck—almost timidly, for he had been so stern!

"You mustn't weep for me too much, husband," she said, in a low voice; "I

have shadowed your life too long, and brought too much of sorrow on your early years."

He sank into the chair Margaret Cheyne had quitted, with the weak arm round his neck still, her last hold on the world and all that had been dear to her within it.

"Ada, it is killing me to hear those words. For mercy's sake, spare me at the last. Whose life have *I* shadowed, and on whose early years have I brought the destroying curse that blasted every hope in me, and struck you down remorselessly? I will ask you to forgive me, Ada—but I dare not ask my God!"

"Hush, hush, dear!" said Ada—"that is not manly—that is not like a Christian. Is it right to ask forgiveness of an erring woman, whose ignorant pride dashed away her happiness and yours,

and seek no pardon for the past in the merciful Creator?"

"Oh, Ada," cried he despairingly, "is it a merciful hand that snatches you away, when you are all to me in life, and when I have prayed so hard you might be spared me?"

"It is a merciful hand," repeated Ada, "and it is stretched above me wisely. It may be best—we have a right to feel it best—that you and I part early thus. Two and twenty years of life are not many," she added, with a little quivering sigh; "and had we lived ~~together~~ once again, we should have been more happy, more considerate—but it is best. I am prepared to die, and oh! Martin," her arm tightening its clasp, "you must be prepared to lose me. You will say, 'God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven!' Kneeling at your mother's feet you said those simple words—you will not reject them, and the holy lesson

taught by them in this solemn hour?"

"I cannot say them," he said, in a deep voice.

"It is my last wish, Martin—with so little while to live here with you now, I ask it. In the name of Him I trust, and who will be good to you when I am gone, I ask it now."

He bowed his head more, but he did not answer.

"Is it the old firmness, Martin?" asked she, softly.

"No, no," he cried; "forgive me, Ada, I am wrong. I will believe it to be best. '*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*'—there!"

"God bless you—you will be brave now to endure."

"I will do my best."

"You will remember me as the Ada of old time—the Ada to whom you came courting, and not the wilful woman who sought the

narrow path of her own creed, and set aside the broader truths which make us faithful followers of God. Martin, I was wrong there!”

“No, not wrong. You——”

“Let me speak, Martin—it is but for a little while.”

Martin trembled, and held her close to his side, and with an effort she rose and laid her head upon his breast—not pil-
lowed there since the fatal morning of their great mistake.

“I was wrong. Those standing on the fragile ground of class, and seeking by form and ceremony, by everything but simple faith and earnest prayer, to lead sinners to repentance, must be wrong; God’s word requires no gilding. I have learned that lesson late in the day, husband.”

“Oh! to have taught that lesson in a truer spirit, and with more of that humility, without which prayer is useless. Oh! for the days

that so recklessly cast off have left me stranded here!"

"We must not look back, Martin—we have not time to turn and mourn over the landmarks left behind. For us the better future!"

"The better future for you, with hope in heaven—but for me the dark and sinful earth."

"There is a duty in the earth on which you're left; till that is worked out we shall not meet. And you will work it faithfully, and not despair, for my sake—I am sure you will."

"I will try."

"Margaret, where is Frank?"

"Downstairs."

"Will you tell him I should like to say—good-bye."

"Not yet—not yet—but a little while longer!" murmured Martin.

"But a very little while," said Ada, speak

ing with more difficulty, "for I am weaker even than I thought. I had hoped to have seen the minister again, but I am at peace, and it is too late now. Is that Frank?"

"Yes," responded Frank hoarsely, as he stepped forward.

She stretched forth her hand, and Frank placed his within it.

"You will take care of this poor fellow here, Frank—he will have need of you, and such strong love as yours. Let him not feel too lonely in his grief—and when the first shock has passed, teach him resignation. He promises to be resigned, but my heart fails me."

"Not in the last hour, Ada, shall it fear for me," said Martin—"I am resigned—I promise resignation."

"You and Margaret will take care of him," said Ada; "when you are married will you let him live with you, and share with you

a little of that happiness which, taking warning from ourselves, I am sure you will enjoy."

Frank and Margaret had never spoken of love again—had in everything but their hearts appeared as far asunder as on that day when the mother stepped between them—but Frank said, "Yes."

"Margaret, will you promise, too, this poor weak sister?"

"Yes," faltered Margaret.

"Now kiss me, each of you, and say good-bye. And so, God bless each of you, and keep you good. Martin, where are you now?"

"Here still. Don't you see me?—don't you feel me at your side?"

"I think—I see you still, but the room is full of mist. There is a light beyond it—is it heaven?"

"I believe so."

“ Will you say those words again before—I
go—dear Martin, I shall be happy—then ! ”

“ THY WILL BE DONE ! ”

THE END.



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